METAL HAMMER

MAIDEN
THE CLASS AND CONTROVERSY OF KILLERS

RAMMSTEIN
MUTTER DISSECTED

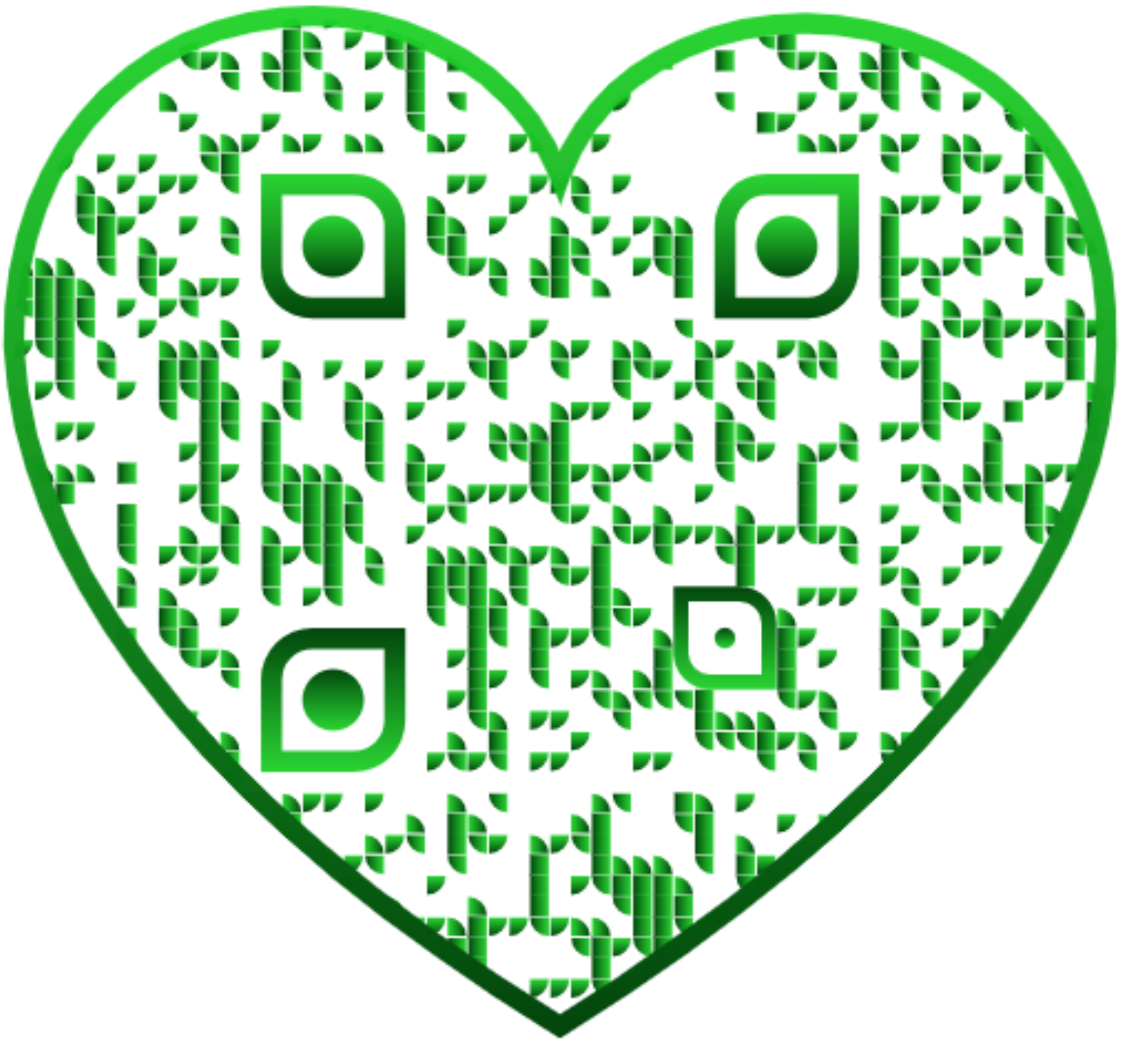
EVANESCENCE
Inside Amy Lee's turbulent decade

SERJ TANKIAN
The Metal Hammer Interview

LG PETROV
An extreme metal icon: our tribute

DEATH METAL SPECIAL
The 20 greatest albums!

FUTURE
ISSUE 347



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I'LL NEVER FORGET THE FIRST TIME I SAW *SONNE*

I WAS AT a mate's house watching *Kerrang!* TV in early 2001, pretty much just waiting for nu metal videos to turn up in between all the pop punk and aging grunge clips. During reruns of *Rollin'*, *Smells Like Teen Spirit*, *Last Resort* and *Basket Case*, a video I hadn't seen before began playing. It started with deep-set voice counting in German, before a driving, piledriver of a riff gave way to one of the most unexpected and unforgettable viewing experiences my tiny teenaged mind had witnessed.

Sooty Germans! Snow White in the bath! Spanking! I had no idea what was going on, but I did know one thing: I'd never seen anything like it before. Twenty years on, and Rammstein's *Mutter* album still sounds as unique, imperious and batshit crazy as it did when I first laid ears on it a few months after watching that *Sonne* video. This month, as rumours abound that Rammstein have a brand new studio album in the tank, we celebrate the record that confirmed the Teutonic six-piece as one of the biggest metal bands of their generation.

As *Hammer* was going to press, we received the terrible news that LG Petrov had passed away. This issue is dedicated to him. Stay safe, and see you all soon.

HORNS UP!

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MEET THE BAND

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH
WRITER
When we got you guys to vote for the greatest Rammstein songs ever last year, it was Alec who took on the mammoth task of writing the piece that revealed all your choices. Who better to dig into *Mutter*, two full decades(!) after it changed the landscape of metal forever?

POLLY GLASS
WRITER
We borrowed Polly from her home at *Classic Rock* magazine this month (cheers, all!) so we could task her with chatting to the one and only Amy Lee about Evanescence's long-overdue studio album. Ten years is a long time, but it turns out Amy's had a lot on her plate…

ALEX DELLER
WRITER
He spends most of his time bringing the strangest, murkiest and straight-up heaviest new bands to New Noise every month, so we thought Alex would be the perfect chap to take on our big feature with the mighty Eyehategod. Do you like riffs, though?

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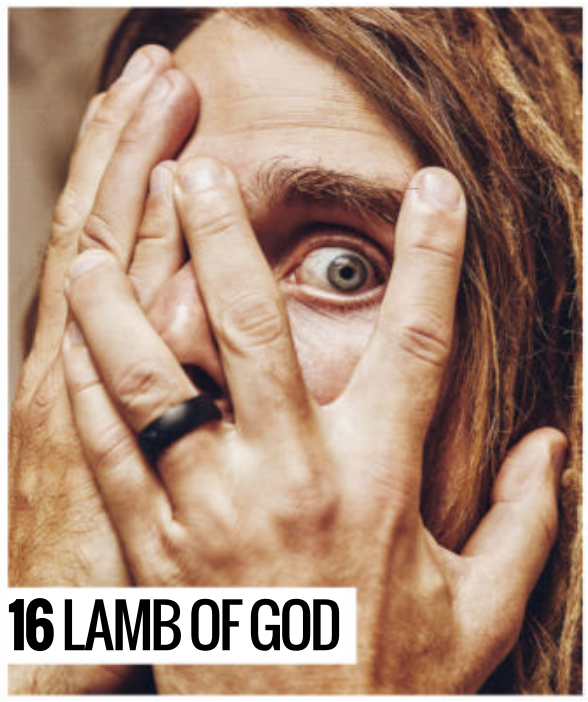

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THE BIG PICTURE

ENJOY THE SILENCE?

PRESS/ISABELLA D'ALESSANDRO

LAST MONTH, ON Saturday February 27, Lacuna Coil stunned fans by taking to a stage in Milan for what was advertised as a concert livestream – only to stand in complete silence for the entire broadcast. The band, alongside 130 other artists across Italy, were drawing public attention to the uncertain future of Italian music venues, which have now been closed for one year due to the pandemic.

"You were expecting to see a live show while we just stood in silence," the band said in a statement. "It's not a bad joke. This is the situation of live clubs in Italy, places where we got to meet many of you. It is with this bitter taste in our mouths that we are asking for your support for them. A live show with no music is not a live show. A silent live club is not a live club."

The campaign, organised by KeepOn Live, Arci, Assomusica and Live DMA, was orchestrated to emphasise that, due to the coronavirus pandemic, many venues may fail to reopen, which could leave as many as 300,000 people without jobs.

THE HOT TOPIC

PRAISE SEITAN!

Meet the YouTube sensation proving that black metal and veganism are a match made in Hell

WORDS: PARIS FAWCETT

SOMEWHERE DEEP IN Orlando, Florida is a kitchen darkly decorated with ornate gothic candelabras, black studded cupboards and an impressive collection of skulls. In the centre stands Brian Manowitz, dressed in full chain armour, covered in corpsepaint and… getting ready to prepare a vegan Pad Thai?

So goes episode one of *Vegan Black Metal Chef*, an unconventional cooking show created by Brian in May 2011. The first episode that aired on YouTube was an overnight viral success – it's currently sitting at more than 3 million views – and set off a career that now includes albums, recipe books and cooking demonstrations that tour the world.

"I guess there was a perfect storm of right place, right time, right atmosphere," says Brian. In 2011, YouTube wasn't new, but it was the beginning of an era where eccentric creators could find a home for their niche ideas. "There's obviously some 'WTF factor' that attracted people," says Brian, "but hopefully they stayed around because I'm definitely passionate about vegan food and I'm passionate about the metal."

Buy the book and grab your oven gloves!

Brian went vegan while in college, and at the same time discovered a love of black metal through bands like Dimmu Borgir. He spent the next 10 years performing in industrial and black metal bands around Orlando before trying his hand at cooking for the first time and creating a show that is anything but conventional. *Vegan Black Metal Chef* is the only place where you'll see extravagant curved daggers slicing garlic, plantain cooked on a ouija board stovetop, and an extraordinary selection of medieval dining equipment. Each video is accompanied by an instructional song to guide you through the recipes, which Brian writes, records, mixes and masters by himself. As for the lyrics, they're a little less, *'Chainsaw in my bleeding hands, as I start to cut you in two'* and more *'Cut the tofu, Turn the plate!'*, and the songs have been released as two full-length albums – 2012's *Season 1: The Reign Of Seitan Begins* and *Season 2: Hell Frozen Over.*

More recently, Brian has expanded *Vegan Black Metal Chef* into a cookbook, releasing *The Seitanic Spellbook* in 2019: a collection of recipes that include pun-inspired dishes such as Curse You All Potatoes and Opus a Enchilada. "They're not crazy newfangled adventures, almost all the recipes in the book are classics from a ton of different cultures," says Brian. Each recipe includes step-by-step pictures to guide cooking and come with links to videos of each dish being made.

Since starting *Vegan Black Metal Chef*, Brian has watched the plant-based movement grow exponentially. Metal has a longstanding history of animal rights campaigners, with legends like Barney Greenway, Serj Tankian and Geezer Butler all speaking for the movement. But recent years have seen even more musicians getting involved, with Architects' Sam Carter describing the lifestyle as "The only option", Californian grind act Cattle Decapitation embedding anti-animal farming lyrics into their songs, and music festivals serving vegan food

You just don't get this shit with Nigella

onsite. In 2017, Brian was asked to perform a cooking demonstration at the legendary Wacken Open Air festival. “They asked me to come out to Wacken because their audience was saying they want more vegan things,” he says. “There’s just been a pretty huge explosion of veganism!”

Speaking of the reasons why veganism is rising in popularity, Brian suggests this is down to a heightened awareness about the animal farming industry. Streaming services are piling up with documentaries that show what really happens in slaughterhouses, research is proving the health and environmental benefits of cutting out animal products, and both supermarkets and restaurants are expanding on their plant-based selections. “Anything that can be destroyed by the truth, should be destroyed by the truth,” Brian says. “The horrid life of animals is not subtle whatsoever, they live an absolute life of hell and probably the best part of their life is when they die. And we can literally eat anything else; we don’t have to be a part of it.” H

***THE SEITANIC SPELLBOOK* IS OUT NOW**

ARCHITECTS: PRESS/ED MASON

“I WAS ASKED TO GO TO WACKEN BECAUSE THEIR AUDIENCE WANTED MORE VEGAN THINGS”

10 THINGS WE LEARNED THIS MONTH

What’s been blowing our tiny brains

ARCHITECTS GOT A NO.1!
This actually happened! High fives and fist bumps all round, lads.

NEW SLIPKNOT MUSIC COULD BE CLOSER THAN WE THINK
Between Clown and Corey’s comments in the media recently, we’re wondering if we hear something soon.

SO COULD NEW AVENGED
We even heard a snippet of material in a recent studio video the band posted. We had to strain for it, though.

Architects’ *For Those That Wish To Exist* went top of the charts

KORN HAVE GOT EVEN STRANGER
Well, kinda; they’ve announced a huge livestream on April 24, broadcasting from the set of LA’s *Stranger Things* Drive-Into Experience. Spooky...

POWER TRIP WILL CONTINUE
At least, in some form. “We do want to continue to play music together; we just are not sure what that looks like at this time,” guitarist Blake Ibanez told the *LA Times*.

HELLOWEEN HAVE GONE FULL HELLOWEEN
The German power metal legends will have all *three* of their singers on this year’s self-titled album.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA PATTONS
Mike Patton has covered the iconic *TMNT* theme for a new game. That’s it. That’s the headline.

SLAPBACK KINDA... SLAPS
The previously unreleased, Dio-era Black Sabbath song is legit, according to Geezer Butler.

SYSTEM ARE AN ‘AGREE TO DISAGREE’ BAND
And unsurprisingly, Serj doesn’t agree with John’s politics. So there ya go.

WE’VE TWEAKED THE *METAL HAMMER* PODCAST
Head over to Spotify, iTunes, Acast and all and let us know if you like the new set-up!

WHAT EXTINCT ANIMAL WOULD YOU BRING BACK?

As the frontman of Loathe, the Deftones-approved young band who are tearing up the UK scene, Kadeem France has a lot to be excited about. But how will he fare with your questions?

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

THERE ARE PLENTY of things that *Hammer* readers want to know about Loathe's Kadeem France, given that he's the frontman of one of the UK's most imaginative and fastest-rising bands. The Liverpudlians just dropped their surprise third album, *The Things They Believe*, and many readers asked about the huge stylistic leap from the grooving tech metal they made their name with to the more electronic and ambient soundscapes on this latest release. And then there are other, equally important matters, like, erm, pasta and *The Office*…

Which movies influenced you the most? And which scenes or score cues stuck with you the most?
@DefendTheUnique (Twitter)
"For me, *The Warriors* [1979's dystopian gangland classic]. The opening scene, the soundtrack to that where they're showing all the gangs and that, it really stuck. It's dead intense but it really fits the scene and makes you want to know what's going on. You have no idea of the plot, but it just sucks you in straight away. I actually played the game before I saw the film, and then once I finally saw the film I loved it straight away."

Will you guys ever tour in Canada?
@NeedsMoreBassHM (Twitter)
"Absolutely. The only thing that scares me is the wildlife – the bears and that. Long drives in the countryside, stopping for a wee… that would scare me a bit."

Is there any idea or concept ready for the next album? And if there is one already, what can we expect?
@mIndz82 (Twitter)
"For every album there's been a concept and they have all been in the same universe. For the next album, it will be a continuation of the story. We just want to try as many new things as possible. We really want to go into everything thinking that we are five artists, not a band who have to do things a certain way. People should expect more of that in the future: just thinking outside the box and trying to do something new."

Loathe: changing it up

Hammer: Do you think having the concept helps you avoid the stereotypes of what a metal band are expected to be?
"Definitely. We had a conversation the other day about how we think about music first, but we also think a lot about plot and character. If this was a film, what would the opening song be? How would the music complement the scene that we were trying to create? I think that helps us be more imaginative, rather than, 'This song has to be heavy' or whatever. It keeps us on a more creative and productive flow."

The Office: US or UK version?
Neil Merchant (email)
"I'm gonna have to say the US…"

Hammer: This is the last time you'll ever be in Metal Hammer. You're dead to us!
"Hold on! I watched the UK one when I was younger, but the US one resonated with me when I was older. I appreciate the UK one. I feel quite bad about that."

Hammer: You should.
"I'm sticking to my guns. US!"

“WE THINK A LOT ABOUT PLOT AND CHARACTER IN OUR SONGS”

Aw mate, Ricky Gervais is gonna be pissed at you...

"IT WOULD BE SICK TO TOUR WITH THE 1975"

Wasps? Fuck 'em!

In a dream scenario, which band do you want to go on tour with next?
Joel Anthony (Facebook)
"Ooh… The 1975, which would be sick. I'm not the biggest fan, it's more Erik [Bickerstaffe, guitars and vocals] and Feisal [El-Khazragi, bass], but I just think it'd be so interesting. The amount that they put into their production, even down to the projections onstage, that's something that we really want to do: to make it more than just another show. Them or Slipknot maybe. Speaking more realistically, our dream tour would be Code Orange and Vein, because that was something that was actually meant to be happening this year. That'd be my dream tour because they are the only two heavy bands that I really listen to at the moment."

What's the meaning behind the lyrics of *Two-Way Mirror*? I've always been fascinated by those lyrics.
@EllisHeasley (Twitter)
"Erik wrote the chorus and I wrote the verses. I've always had a bit of a rocky relationship with my dad, and then had a phone call with him and it was the first time we'd had a conversation as two adults. I'd kind of resented him for not being around, but when we had that conversation I saw his side of the story for the first time, and it was me coming to terms with me seeing a lot of myself in my father. Looking at myself, and thinking, I can do better within myself, and be a better man because I have that clarity. That's what inspired it, but I've seen a lot of people say it helped them with their mental health, and it's really cool that people can interpret that in their own way."

Loathe got massive props from Chino Moreno from Deftones. How much of a boost did that give your sales numbers and do you think more elder statesmen bands have a duty to know what new, exciting stuff is going on and start shouting about it?
Ben Willmott (Facebook)
"It was sick. When I saw that tweet I thought he'd been hacked! It was proper surreal: a band that you grew up listening to – when I was 18 or 19, I was obsessed – a band that really helped us to grow and progress, giving us props. A day or two after the tweet the views for our videos shot up, and all the comments went from 'This sounds like Deftones' to 'Chino sent me here!' So we got a nice little boost from that! Do I think artists are obliged to do that? I mean, I guess so. There's probably a lot of older artists that just aren't plugged into what is going on these days, so you can't really blame them, that's the way life goes. You do your thing and then the world moves on, but if you continue to keep yourself involved and you enjoy those bands then you should definitely shout them out, because it's such great motivation and a boost."

What shape of pasta do you like most?
@doll_doom (Twitter)
"I dunno, what's it called… the thick pasta, it's like a thick tube? I always use it to make macaroni cheese…"

Hammer: That's rigatoni, mate.
"Rigatoni! That's it, that's the one!"

You can bring back one extinct animal but you have to get rid of another. Which do you choose and why?
Ellie Pilsborough (email)
"I might be wrong with this, but I think the Liver Bird, which sits on top of the Liver Building in Liverpool, is extinct now. I've never seen what one of them looks like in real life, so I'd like to see that [Ed: er, sorry mate, but they're actually mythical]. But get rid of? Oh man… what are those dogs that can't breathe? Maybe I'd get rid of them because they are suffering all the time. Is it an English Bulldog? I love dogs, but I've never seen one that looks happy…"

Hammer: You're getting rid of an English Bulldog over wasps?!
"Yeah, nah! Fuck wasps! I'm changing it, I'll save the English Bulldog for those fucking wasps!"

How do your moms feel about the name of your band, on a scale of light tsking to loud and unrelenting condemnation?
@JoFleischer1 (Twitter)
"My mum was so supportive initially that I don't think she even noticed the name. Now she's really religious and she does go, 'Why did you call the band Loathe? Why would you say that?' and I'm like, 'Ah, you just don't get it.' So I would say she's more on the extreme end. She hates the name, but it's not even that extreme, but I think she's gone on some religious journey where everything has to be nice."

How do Loathe start writing? Does it start with an idea that comes out through instruments? Playing a melody? Jamming? I've always gotten a 'live' vibe out of your music.
@Torque_Bow_ (Twitter)
"It's more films and stuff, anything that inspires us visually, we'll try and create a feeling from that. Or other artists – Spotify Discover Weekly has been great for us finding musical artists away from metal that inspire us. Some songs we write together as a band, vibing off of each other, and then other times Sean [Radcliffe, drums] will write a song and bring it to us and it gets passed around all of us and we add our own little bit. Sometimes it's immediate, sometimes we sit on it for a bit. We've always started off with instrumentals and not vocals, but we're trying to go in with the vocals in mind now, that's a new thing for us."

***THE THINGS THEY BELIEVE* IS OUT NOW VIA SHARPTONE**

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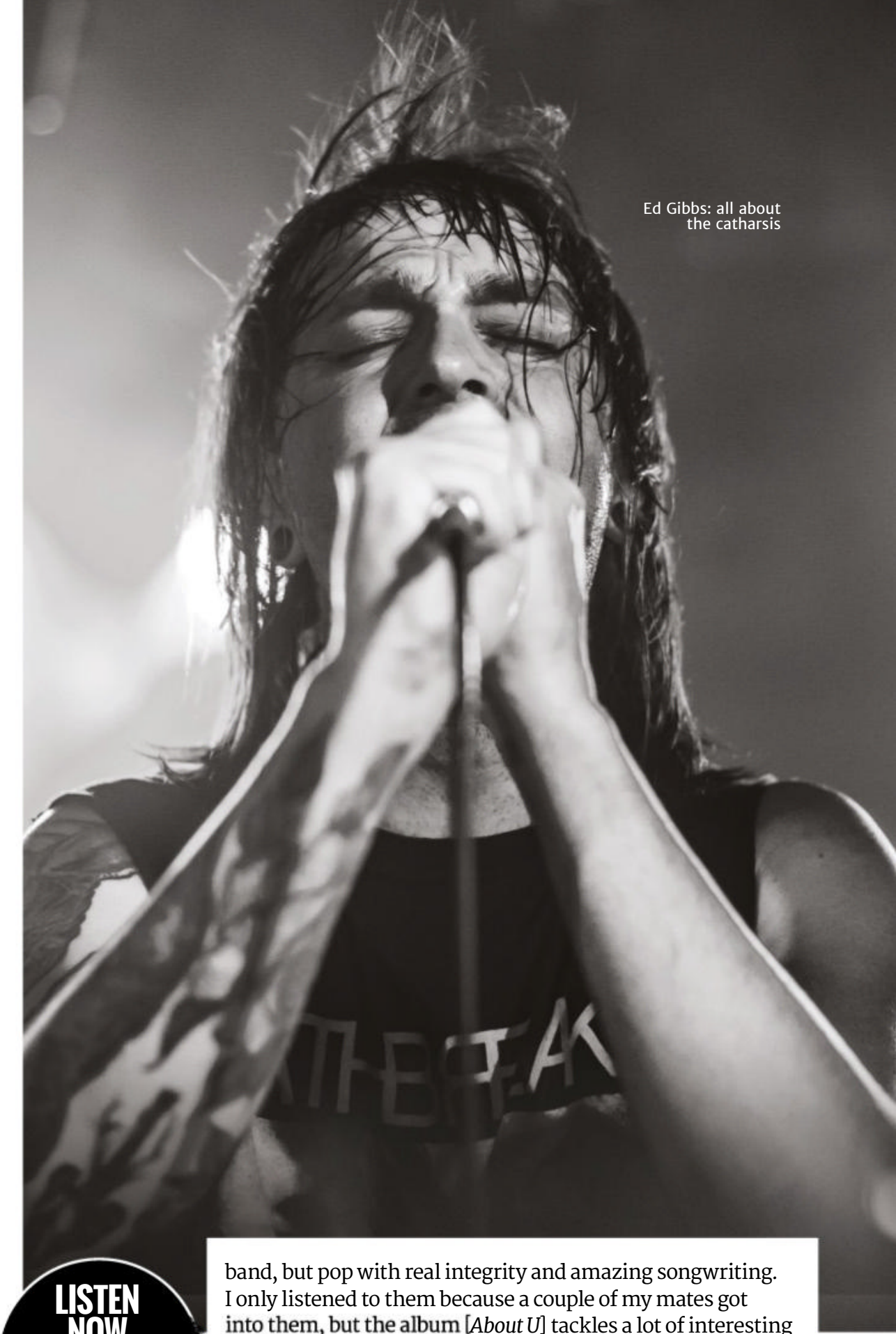
THE SLAYLIST

ED GIBBS

The Devil Sold His Soul singer guides us through his record collection, from melodic hardcore to post-rock and pop surprises

WORDS: YASMINE SUMMAN



Ed Gibbs: all about the catharsis

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"*BROOKLYN DODGERS* BY **I AM THE AVALANCHE** is one of my all-time favourite songs. Me and my wife loved it so much that we walked back down the aisle to it after we got married! When my wife and I first started getting into Avalanche, we were on holiday in Cornwall and had forgotten that we'd booked tickets to see them in Wales, so we had to drive all the way up to Wales to watch them for one day in the middle of a holiday!

"Growing up, I was absolutely obsessed with Daryl Palumbo. That was my fucking thing, emulating him. The song *El Mark* by **GLASSJAW** didn't necessarily have a big influence on the band, but it did for me as a vocalist. I first found Glassjaw when I was 14 or 15, they were played on the *Radio 1 Rock Show*. It just blew my mind as to what heavy music could be, because at the time it was just saturated with nu metal.

"I just love melodic hardcore – **COMEBACK KID**'s *Do Yourself A Favour* has the aggressive vibes and speed of hardcore, but then you get all this melody too. This album is fucking raging from beginning to end: an absolute stomping riff-fest. *Disparity* is probably one of the first songs I heard by **SVALBARD**, and it's melodic hardcore with a message: it's real, it makes you feel stuff. That's my thing: it has to be about catharsis and emotion.

"We were on tour and got offered a spot with **ENVY** out of the blue. I remember I was helping to set up merch, and they started soundchecking with *Scene*. Every hair on my body went up: I will never forget that moment. That song is just classic Envy.

"**ROLO TOMASSI**'s past three records have been just absolutely untouchable; they're a hard band to pick a song for. They're just showing everyone how it's done! *Rituals* has got this cool intro: it sounds like Bowser's Castle off *Super Mario World*!

"*Everything* by **MUNA** is probably something no one would expect to see in *Metal Hammer*. They're a straight-up pop band, but pop with real integrity and amazing songwriting. I only listened to them because a couple of my mates got into them, but the album [*About U*] tackles a lot of interesting stuff in terms of equality and acceptance. That's really cool.

"I fucking love **TOUCHÉ AMORÉ**'s *Stage Four*. When that album came out I was like, 'Oh my God, they've done it.' Then *Flowers & You* comes on and it's the saddest song ever. It is all about catharsis for me. It's all about screaming as hard as I can, and singing in a way that just lets me get a load off my chest. Even if what I'm getting off my chest isn't what I'm actually singing about, just getting through that is cathartic.

"**JENIFEREVER** have never had the recognition that I feel they deserved. That post-rock vibe can kind of get self-indulgent, but Jeniferever turn that vibe into structured songs, which is a real skill because post-rock in itself is quite meandering, I guess. *Concrete And Glass* is just beautiful.

"I started getting into bands like **CULT OF LUNA** and **ISIS** when I was at college. I was getting into that slower, more progressive stuff, and thinking, 'OK, this is interesting!' *Finland* [by Cult Of Luna] is a really cool, innovative song. The sweet thing about that song is that it's got all these beautiful twinkly parts with loads of clean guitars, and then this dirty, slow, heavy riff kicks in – it's everything I love about this band. It was a choice between that song and the last song off *Mariner* [*Cygnus*], that they did with Julie Christmas. She's got this cool kind of Mike Patton vibe where she does vocal gymnastics. It's fucking amazing – like Cult Of Luna Plus!"

"I WALKED DOWN THE AISLE TO I AM THE AVALANCHE"

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LIFE LESSONS

RANDY BLYTHE

The Lamb Of God frontman reflects on the highs, lows and personal battles that went into forging more than a quarter-century of heavy metal brilliance

WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PICTURES: TRAVIS SHINN

FROM HIS ORIGINS as a punk rock-loving kid in Richmond, VA in the mid-90s through to establishing himself at the forefront of the burgeoning New Wave of American Heavy Metal movement at the turn of the millennium, Randy Blythe has never shied away from fighting his corner. With a new live record just out and more than a quarter-century with Lamb Of God in the rearview mirror, *Hammer* caught up with the firebrand frontman for the pearls of wisdom that have seen him through his darkest hours.

FRONTMEN ARE BORN, NOT MADE

"People might not like this, but I do think it's true! I don't mean that as a frontman you can't get better – singing and interacting with the audience are both things I've had to work on *a lot*. The main requirement to be a great frontman is the willingness to get in front of a group of people and make a complete idiot out of yourself again and again until you get good at it! It's a personality thing; I'm very willing to make an idiot of myself and people clearly saw that because it was like, 'This guy, he'll do it.'"

JUST BECAUSE A SHOW IS BIGGER, IT DOESN'T MEAN IT'S BETTER

"The first real big concert I went to was ZZ Top at Hampton Coliseum. It was a good show; there were all these bikers smoking weed outside and I'd never been around that kind of thing, so it was a wild experience for someone in 7th grade! That was a big arena rock show, but obviously as I got into punk rock I started to realise that there were shows just as – if not many times more – exciting as ZZ Top, that you could see for $5. Some of the earlier shows I saw that impacted me were Circle Jerks with 7 Seconds, Agnostic Front with The Vandals and Bad Brains with Leeway and COC – a show I've never seen topped in my entire life. Each of those shows was in a 300-capacity club; it wasn't just seeing the bands, it was the community that arose around it of utter weirdos – which I most definitely was!"

MUSIC IS ITS OWN REWARD

"When we started gaining traction and gaining a fanbase, we had younger bands come to us – just as I did with older bands when *we* were coming up – asking, 'How did you do this?' about getting a practice space, or getting a tour. We're not even talking huge megabucks tours – it was just the nuts and bolts of being a band. But because this modern age sets ludicrous goals that are by and large unattainable, we started getting questions like, 'I'm thinking of forming a band; what advice can you give me on how to succeed in the music business?' and it's like, 'Are you fucking kidding me?!' That shouldn't be your goal. Don't get me wrong, it's nice that I get to pay my bills making music and it's very nice that I get to go out and see the world with my band, but the reason why I'm in a band is because we love the process of making music – *that* is the real experience."

THERE'S A LOT OF DARKNESS IN OUR OLD SONGS

"I look at lyrics I wrote 15, 20 years ago and understand that they were messages to myself. Even 20 years ago I knew I was in trouble and going down a dark path, so I was commenting on that in songs. We recently did the entirety of *Ashes Of The Wake* and I had to go back and read lyrics to learn songs we've never played live: it really brought home how I was writing back then. When I write these days – and I'm not saying I'm any kind of wise, nirvana-state Buddha or anything – there is negative stuff in the lyrics, but I try to balance it with consciously positive stuff because that's how I'm trying to live my life."

"I'M VERY WILLING TO MAKE AN IDIOT OF MYSELF"

I'D BE DEAD BY NOW IF I HADN'T GOTTEN SOBER

"It's a well-known fact I was a fuckin' alcoholic and I've not had a drink in well over 10 years now. Unfortunately, I've known people who didn't embrace the choice to try something different and they're dead now. I don't know what it is within me – I'm certainly not saying I'm special, or made of stronger moral fibre than anyone else – that I made that conscious decision, but I did and I feel pretty fucking lucky. The driving force was, 'I'm going to quit drinking or I'm going to die.'"

BUT GETTING SOBER WASN'T AN OVERNIGHT THING

"I battled [alcoholism] for a *loooong* time and it took four-and-a-half years of trying to get sober to finally get sober. One morning on tour in Australia I woke up and just felt horrible and empty. I was in a good place; we were on tour with Metallica – it doesn't get much better than that – I had money in the bank and my personal life wasn't too much in tatters. On the outside everything looked good, but I just felt like there was this horrific void. I realised I had to try something different. I don't think there's anything wrong with drinking, but there was something wrong with drinking for myself and drinking in the way I did."

LIFE ISN'T JUST A SERIES OF BINARY CHOICES

"As evidenced by recent events in America, things are currently so divisive and there's absolutely no compromise. People won't even consider other viewpoints and I think that's largely shaped by social media; people get pushed towards this two-party system that is very 'Yes/No', 'Democrat/Republican', 'Blue/Red' with no discourse or ability to speak on any kind of level playing field. When you're driven into these corners with constant antagonism, it drives people to extremism and once you go into that realm there's zero hope for rational discourse. With age you learn life is about compromise and that's something in the band we've gotten better at with age, especially because we're five very different dudes."

THERE SHOULD BE NO 'US' OR 'THEM'

"The most important thing you get from travelling a lot is perspective, it makes you realise the universal nature of humanity. I grew up during the Cold War, right? As a child I was convinced the Soviet Union was going to nuke us, but when you get this idea of people as this nebulous 'other' it becomes easy to dehumanise them and forget they're just other people. I was a well-seasoned traveller long before Lamb Of God and I had zero money back then so would travel on the cheap. I love it because it exposes me to different cultures – with different clothes, skin tones and foods – but at the core we're

Binary choices?!
Noooooo!

Randy is all about keeping it real

"ON THE OUTSIDE EVERYTHING LOOKED GOOD, BUT THERE WAS THIS HORRIFIC VOID"

all the same. It also makes me realise how lucky I am to live where I do."

ENJOY WHAT YOU HAVE – NOT WHAT YOU SEE ONLINE

"Especially with the digital world, material symbols of status become a constant end-goal. But to actually have experiences and to live a good life you need to form relationships with real people and actually try to live life with a well-calibrated moral compass. We shouldn't be constantly looking at these digitally filtered perceptions of reality and aspiring to the false paradigm of happiness they represent – that's not real. You have to remain engaged with reality – I've certainly been through times where I've not been happy with my current reality, but you have to look at that reality and engage with it, appreciate it for what it is rather than wishing for something else."

LIVESTREAMS ARE STRANGE, BUT NO STRANGER THAN ANYTHING ELSE IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

"People kept asking: wasn't playing the livestream *weird?* Sure, it was kinda weird not having an audience, but at the same time we rehearsed for a week at Mark's [Morton] house after having not spent any time together for months. When I got in the room with those other four dudes, just us making music and playing to no one, it was an amazing feeling and incredibly rewarding. All I was thinking was 'I'm making music with my dudes in a garage again', and that was *awesome*. But don't get me wrong… I'm *so* ready to get in front of a fuckin' audience!"

NEVER STOP TRYING NEW THINGS

"As you get older it becomes easy to flip into a sedentary life and stop taking chances. I find having artistic outlets important to keep me sharp. There are situations I've been in as a photographer that have been pretty dangerous; I spent a lot of this last summer with tear gas in the air and rubber bullets flying around, but it's a bit like surfing – the more you surf, the more you progress and you end up getting onto bigger waves. It becomes even more important to stay engaged and in the moment. It's important to stay artistically curious about things – and things like surfing literally keep my survival instincts intact."

***LAMB OF GOD: LIVE IN RICHMOND, VA* IS OUT NOW VIA NUCLEAR BLAST**

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IN THE STUDIO

LINGUA IGNOTA

One of the most exhilarating voices of the underground returns – with added banjo

WORDS: HANNAH MAY KILROY • PICTURES: KRISTIN HAYTER

Kristin Hayter: playing everything except the kitchen sink (that's probably just out of shot)

WE DON'T THROW the word 'masterpiece' around lightly, but Kristin Hayter aka Lingua Ignota's 2019 debut, *Caligula*, is certainly worthy of that accolade – a bewilderingly inventive work of stately beauty and jarring noise that triumphantly turned her personal trauma into glorious art. She's spent the past year working on its follow-up, *Sinner Get Ready*, which she reveals has a few surprises in store.

When did you first go into the studio, and how has it been?
"Around February of last year. We had no idea of the severity of what was going on. Seth [Manchester, producer] is a valuable part of my project and the studio is like this little enclave outside Providence, it's kinda like the only thing there! I'm not very good at knocking things out in short periods of time. Typically I go back and forth a few times to work on things with Seth, take it home, listen for a few months and go back. It's about a nine-hour drive from where I live in Pennsylvania. There were a few times where we had to cancel, or it wasn't safe to travel, and once we had to quarantine in the studio for three weeks. So it's been about a year in the making! Thankfully, there weren't really any time constraints."

Did you feel pressure to follow up *Caligula*?
"Oh yeah! Ha ha! Very much so! And I felt pressure making *Caligula* as well, like I had a lot to prove. For this new one, I had to do something completely different. So I'm kind of rebelling against the model I created with *Caligula*."

THE FACTS

ALBUM:
Two

STUDIO:
Machines With Magnets Studio, Pawtucket, Rhode Island

PRODUCERS:
Seth Manchester and Kristin Hayter

EXPECT:
A twist on Lingua Ignota's harsh sonics told through traditional instrumentation

How is it different?
"I do reference a lot of things I've already done, trying to build on that world. *Caligula* is so multi-genre: an all-genre, no-genre kind of mess! I wanted to take some directions that I'd been pursuing in parts of *Caligula*. There is almost nothing electronic happening on this record. We have some synth aspects, but they're just creating a bit of harmonics. It's more traditional instrumentation. Trying to inhabit the instruments as they are, and to push them to their limits without digital or electronic manipulation. It could be seen as quieter, but it's really not – it's just as intense as previous work, but it has a traditional feeling, like American traditional folk."

We spotted a banjo on your Instagram.
"Yes! Ha ha! I bought a banjo! There are a lot of instruments that we utilised on this record that I had no idea how to play, and I played them anyway! I made my banjo debut, and my cello debut. I was interested in the tonality and timbre of the banjo, what it implies about American music, but creating a different context for it. We worked with this incredible arranger and composer, Ryan Seaton, who did incredible horn and woodwind arrangements. We also have mountain dulcimer, bowed psaltery, and we have bells all over the place – I collected a bunch of bells, scouring antique shops looking for brass bells of different shapes and sizes that would make interesting layers with each other. That was fun! So it's a really different palette for me, but it was exciting to explore."

Are there still classical elements?
"There are because that's the way my brain works, but I think they are more covert. There was a focus on producing a particular kind of song structure that fits with the themes, so big baroque flourishes are gone for the most part."

Can you tell us anything about the album's concepts?
"The record ended up being very much about my experience of the year. It was a dark year for everyone. I had some interpersonal things going on, I had surgery on my back and spine, so I had a bunch of months where I was in excruciating pain, trying to get surgery during COVID. Also I was in a totally different place where I've never lived before, in Pennsylvania. A lot of the palette of what I understand as Pennsylvanian has seeped into this record; it's a very interesting, remote, isolated and kind of dark place, and I think it has become a big part of how the record sounds."

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THE STORY BEHIND

CLOUDS OVER CALIFORNIA BY DEVILDRIVER

Written for landmark third album *The Last Kind Words*, this future setlist staple for the modern metal heavyweights revealed things weren't as sunny as they seemed

WORDS: DOM LAWSON

NEARLY TWO DECADES on from their formation in Santa Barbara, California, Devildriver are firmly established as a permanent fixture in the metal world. One of the most legendarily hard-working bands in the business, Dez Fafara and his comrades won people over the old-school way: by touring relentlessly and making new albums at every opportunity. The first two Devildriver albums – 2003's eponymous debut and 2005's *The Fury Of Our Maker's Hand* – had aggressively established the band's trademark blend of brutal grooves and dark, melodic hooks, but it was their third – *The Last Kind Words* – that truly sealed their reputation as modern metal heavyweights. Released in the summer of 2007, it was an incendiary eruption of rage and riffs, replete with several instant classics. From the outside, it looked as though Devildriver were hitting a new level of potency. But according to Dez, things were not running entirely smoothly behind the scenes.

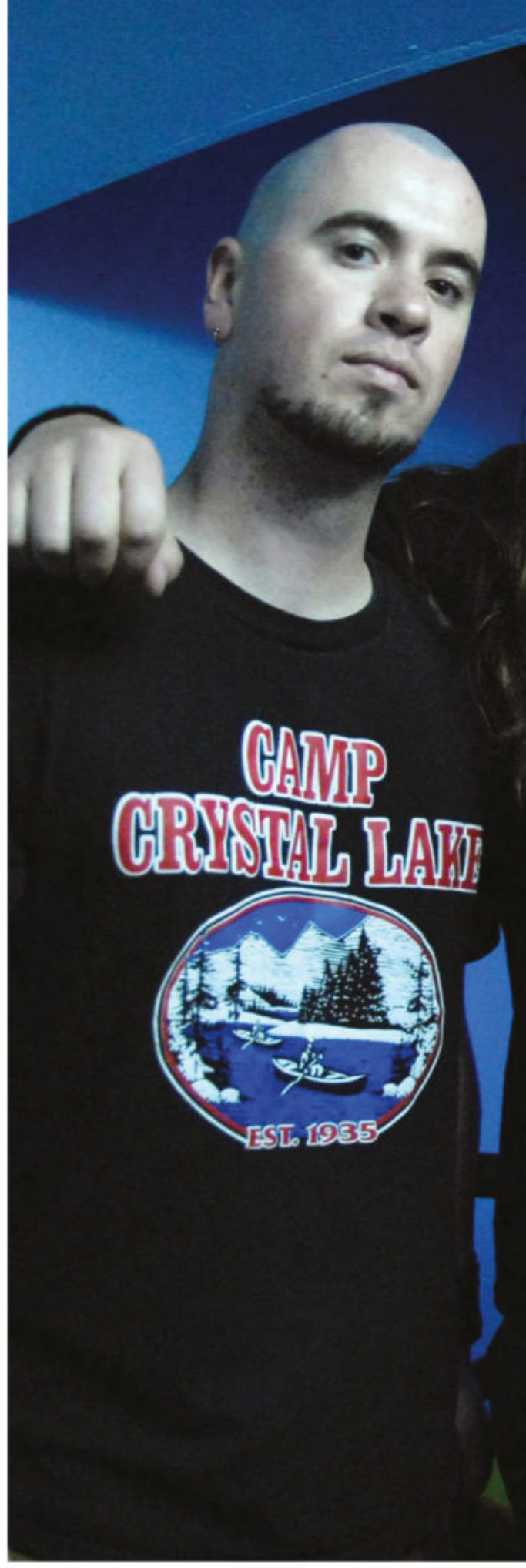
"There was a real craziness behind that record," he states. "We were putting out a record every two years, we were touring constantly. When we were at home, we were writing and recording. So I think the band unit itself, during that time, was starting to come apart, to be honest. But the music, oddly enough, was *really* coming together. I'd said to the guys that it had to be a heavier record, with more groove, and we had to put our best foot forward, and the guys really brought it."

Although Devildriver released *Head On To Heartache (Let Them Rot)* as a single prior to the release of *The Last Kind Words*, it would be the album's second track that was swiftly embraced as an anthem for the band's ever-expanding fanbase. Brutal and relentless but eminently catchy, *Clouds Over California* has remained a permanent fixture in Devildriver's setlists ever since, its chorus call-to-arms of *'Let the chaos reign!'* becoming an expected moment of chaos at the band's already chaotic and exhilarating shows. Despite its aggressive, pit-inciting vibe, the song was originally inspired by a much more reflective moment.

"I was sitting in our town house in Santa Barbara, about a block away from the Santa Barbara Bowl, where a lot of music goes on," Dez recalls. "On Saturdays I could sit out in my backyard and hear The Eagles or whoever was playing. It was a pretty interesting spot. It had a vibe about it, up against the mountains with 100-foot eucalyptus trees all around me. I was looking outside, through these big double doors out to my backyard and up at the mountains, and there were clouds *everywhere*."

With two weeks left to finalise lyrics for *The Last Kind Words*, Dez was on the lookout for inspiration and this unusually dark and gloomy California day was just the kickstart he needed.

"My wife Anastasia and I started talking, and I can't remember if it was her or I, but someone said, 'No one's going anywhere if there's clouds over California!' because *no one* goes out in the rain here, you know? That started the whole process. In that song, I'm discussing the nature of the beast and being in a band, being driven to do what you want to do, and really going for it. It's about the way it feels on tour, too. *'Lost in this*



SHUTTERSTOCK

THE FACTS

RELEASED:
2007

ALBUM:
The Last Kind Words

PERSONNEL:
Dez Fafara (vocals)
Mike Spreitzer (lead guitar)
Jeff Kendrick (rhythm guitar)
Jon Miller (bass)
John Boecklin (drums)

HIGHEST CHART POSITION:
N/A

Devildriver were on top form with their third album, but the line-up was not to last

world, out on the edge, with death by our sides...' That was because we'd already experienced nearly dying in an RV. We'd had a *lot* of craziness happen to us. And then the line, *'Let the chaos reign!'* was *definitely* written to be said from the stage."

FRESH FROM THE road, the band arrived at Sonic Ranch Studio, near El Paso in Texas, in November 2006. The band were certainly enjoying a great sense of collective momentum at that point, but *The Last Kind Words* was still destined to be a hugely important record in their careers. Unfortunately, having spent such vast amounts of time together on the road, tensions between them were at an all-time high.

"The music was great, but it was all coming apart at the seams on that record," Dez recalls, ruefully. "We were in Texas, out on a 55/60-acre pecan farm in the middle of the desert, butted up against the Mexican mountains. Me and [drummer] John Boecklin were totally at each other's throats. Everyone was staying in their rooms and there was a really trippy, distant feel between us. We vibed together at the *end* of the session, but it was a weird time. Looking back, it was because we'd toured so much and we needed a break, but we just went straight into the studio."

"I LAID THAT SONG DOWN IN MAYBE FOUR TAKES, BUT I WAS *HAMMERED*!"

Irrespective of the weird atmosphere, Devildriver clearly achieved their goals at Sonic Ranch. Songs like ferocious opening track *Not All Who Wander Are Lost* and, of course, *Clouds Over California* were more vicious and more memorable than anything the band had done before. Despite themselves, the Californians were set to outstrip their previous achievements and deliver an authentic modern classic, and Dez was in a celebratory mood as he entered the vocal booth to record his band's soon-to-be ultimate crowd-pleaser.

"I remember that the night that we were recording *Clouds Over California*, the band was vibing and getting along extremely well," he notes. "We were out in this beautiful

Dez Fafara: raring to unleash chaos again as soon as venues open up

studio, in the middle of the desert, it's night time and inside there's Native American stuff everywhere and dimmer lights and it was just a really magical thing. Before I'd record, I used to like to sit with the band and get fuckin' drunk and listen to Pantera or Black Sabbath or whatever the go-to was at that time. We drank a gallon of Jack Daniels and then I said to the producer – quite rudely if I'm honest – 'Turn the fuckin' mic on!' Jason [Suecof, producer] turned on the mic and I laid that song down in maybe four takes. But yeah, I was *hammered* when I recorded that tune! Ha ha ha!"

They almost certainly still needed a break, but Devildriver soon hit the road again, armed with their strongest album to date. By the time they reached Europe, it was more than apparent that *Clouds Over California* had been adopted as a major anthem for the band's diehard fans, and the subsequent circle-pits and outright chaos that erupted at every single show noisily confirmed that Devildriver were the real deal. If anyone was still ambivalent about the singer from Coal Chamber's new band, seeing them live was practically guaranteed to seal the deal.

"THE MUSIC WAS GREAT, BUT IT WAS ALL COMING APART AT THE SEAMS"

"I definitely think the band had a lot to prove, and it was quite a run with those guys," says Dez. "I wouldn't change a minute. Everybody gave their all. I had a great time with everybody, and I was surrounded by great musicians who were doing great shit and going off onstage. We were fucking hungry. I was the hungriest guy on the planet and they were matching that hunger. They all fucking killed it."

Not content with making their best album to date and smashing all-comers on the road, Devildriver also pulled off a major coup when *Clouds Over California* was selected as one of the songs for 2007 videogame *Rock Band*.

"My kids played that game, so it was kind of cool!" Dez chuckles. "Their friends were over and they'd be playing that game and our song was on it, and I have to admit that it was a little surreal. But that was a lucky moment, for sure."

Today, only Dez and guitarist Mike Spreitzer remain from the line-up that recorded *The Last Kind Words*, but Devildriver are still firmly in Go Mode, albeit currently thwarted by pandemic restrictions. Nonetheless, when some kind of normality returns, you can guarantee that Devildriver will be one of the first bands to hit the road with a vengeance, armed, as ever, with one of the greatest ever songs to lose your shit to. As Dez himself bellows from the stage each night, *'Let the chaos reign!'*

"Every band has those songs that you absolutely have to play live. I can't imagine Devildriver playing a show and *not* playing *Clouds Over California* or *I Could Care Less*," Dez concludes. "We just couldn't do it. I'll get seven songs into the show and people are always screaming for *Clouds Over California*. Every show! It's like, 'Dude, we're going to get to it, I promise! We have 15 songs to play and it's coming! Oh, and by the way, I haven't taken a breath in an hour, so calm down, you'll get your tune!' Ha ha ha!" H

***DEALING WITH DEMONS – PART 1* IS OUT NOW VIA NAPALM**

SHUTTERSTOCK

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YOUR SHOUT

STOP DOING PRIEST WRONG!

And other such demands, queries and thoughts you lot shared with us this month

Judas Priest: way too low?

BAD OPINIONS RISING

Was happy to see Judas Priest make the Greatest Songs Of The Century list (issue #346), but way too low down for my liking. Also, if I could only pick one Priest track, it'd have to be *Judas Rising*! Rob's comeback song and an all-time Priest classic!
Robert Taylor (email)

Look, part of the deal with doing these lists is that we basically have to pick between children when it comes to certain bands' songs. *Judas Rising* is A Banger™, no doubt about it, but Priest are on such almighty form in the last few years that we had to go with an even more recent track!

CHOP POOEY

Chop Suey No.1? Depressingly predictable. Being the biggest doesn't always mean being the best, especially given that *Chop Suey* wouldn't even make System's Top 10 songs, let alone *every* band of the last 21 years.
Zach Roberts (Facebook)

Something something it's the way you use it something something… anyway, if you asked all seven members of Team *Hammer* for their favourite System Of A Down track, you would probably get seven different answers. But for lasting impact? Legacy? *Greatness*? Hundreds of millions of metalheads can't be wrong.

IRON WILL

Maiden not getting into the Top 10 songs of the century is a disgrace. You're telling me a Ghost song is better than *Wicker Man*? Literally impossible. Who decided this shit?
Jack Carter (Facebook)

Ghost: it seems not everybody worships at Papa's altar. Weird

We do. Sorry pal! That said, you know there's gonna be arguments when these things get made – we should know, we had enough of them amongst the staff just making the thing! If it makes you feel better, Maiden win just about every other metal list we can think of. Even Top 10 Bands That Aren't Iron Maiden.

CERTIFIED FRESH

It's nice to see a list about the best songs from the last couple of decades not just be made up of pre-2005 tracks. I know nu metal was big and early Slipknot was good etc etc… but there's so much good shit from the last few years! Was awesome to see Gojira, Architects, Venom Prison and others get a mention. Good job.
Dan Kerr (email)

See?! Some people do appreciate us! Thanks, Dan. We love you too (but not as much as we love Gojira, Architects and Venom Prison. Sorry, Dan).

CHERRY-PICKED

Just wanna say what a beacon of light in the shit show that is 2020/2021 Serena Cherry is. We need more like her and I loved reading more about her life experiences and beliefs in the last issue. Svalbard rule!
Domini Meacher (email)

We heart emoji Serena too! And we're pretty damn sure you'll be reading more about Svalbard in these pages before the year is out. That band are just too good to ignore.

BOTTLE OF WHINE

I swear if metalheads on Facebook spent less time moaning about bands they hate and more time promoting and bigging up the bands they love, we'd have Gojira in stadiums by now. But no, gotta waste more time ragging on Babymetal first…
Elisabeth Abraham (Facebook)

You're probably right. Will our beloved Facebook keyboard warriors ever change their ways?

#TWEETS

I think I'm just about ready to come back from the holidays mentally
Laura Jane Grace
(@LauraJaneGrace)

100 people unfollowed me overnight. Was it because I called Cuomo a sleezebag or because I quoted the infamous "just grab em by the pussy" remark? Y'all so sensitive.
Mark Morton
(@MarkDuaneMorton)

Never apologise for being excited or passionate about change …nothing better than seeing that light in someone's eyes when they are truly invested in positive change
Dani Winter-Bates
(@DanBuryTomorrow)

I'm an odd combination of "Really Sweet" and "Don't Mess With Me!"
Rhea Ripley
(@RheaRipley_WWE)

Sex magick & chill
Twin Temple
(@TwinTemple)

MAIDEN: JOHN MCMURTRIE/PRESS GHOST/PRIEST: PRESS

Iron Maiden: not exactly short of accolades

THE BIG DEBATE

In a recent issue of *Metal Hammer*, Korn/Love And Death guitarist Head suggested that Korn had inspired their fair share of good and, um, not so good metal bands. Here's what you lot had to say on the matter.

HE SAID

"I look at who came after us, and bands really took our sound and did amazing things with it; look at Slipknot and look at Linkin Park! I love both those bands, and they took what we did into whole new directions. So, we inspired some bands that are much bigger than us, and some crappy bands as well."

YOU SAY

I hated most nu metal but you can't deny Korn changed the game forever. I'd take a thousand Union Undergrounds if it means we get to keep *Follow The Leader.*
David Bird (Facebook)

People rag on nu metal but the scene would be so much healthier if we still had bands like Linkin Park, Limp Bizkit and all their mates tearing up the singles and albums charts. Or, even better: if metal produced new bands that could do that.
James Bayliss (Facebook)

Head seems in a good place now and you can't really hold that against him. Happy for him, and Love And Death have some good songs.
Hayley James (Facebook)

Korn still put out material better than 99% of modern metal bands so I hope they keep inspiring as many crappy bands as they like personally.
Jake S Farrell (Facebook)

Wait, Head is back in Korn? What did I miss?
Dave Carroll (Facebook)

JOIN THE BIG DEBATE AT FACEBOOK.COM/METALHAMMERREADERS

Almost certainly not. Do we love them for their negativity all the same, though? Also no.

RAMM, BAM, THANK YOU MA'AM

I always take anything with a pinch of salt when it comes to websites reporting on bands making 'secret albums', but Flake saying Rammstein have a new album… that's as from the horse's mouth as you can get, right?! So we can get excited now?
Chloe Butler (Facebook)

We're not ones to push the hype machine too hard, but we would say that, yes, at this point, it appears we can start getting excited. Which is nice!

MAIDEN HEAVEN

An Iron Maiden set opener of *Genghis Khan/Ides Of March/Wrathchild* would be welcome, and also throwing in *Only The Good Die Young* from *Seventh Son Of A Seventh Son*. Bringing back *Phantom Of The Opera* would be great, since *Number Of The Beast* and *Hallowed Be Thy Name* have become a bit of a cliché lately!
Simon Hill (Facebook)

Not asking for much then, are you Simon?! We back all of those choices, though. Honestly, we'd even take *Run To The Hills* 10 times over if it meant we could actually watch Iron Maiden on a stage in the real world again.

COVERED IN GLORY

Why are so many shitty metalcore bands covering even shittier pop songs all the time?! Your band sucks, if you have to piggyback off a bigger song to get streams, you probably suck even more.
Jamie Stiles (Facebook)

Someone needs their Cheerios this morning! There are a lot of bands smashing out covers these days, but if it means bands can get a bit more attention and make more money in an era where so few people are buying albums, we can live with it.

HAMMER STEREO

What's been blowing our office speakers

WHILE SHE SLEEPS
Sleeps Society
"One of the UK's very finest are back on peak form"
MERLIN ALDERSLADE
EDITOR

EVANESCENCE
The Bitter Truth
"Nu metal… but make it grown up"
ELEANOR GOODMAN
DEPUTY EDITOR

FUOCO FATUO
Obsidian Katabasis
"All-devouring cosmic doom like having tantric sex with Cthulhu itself"
JONATHAN SELZER
REVIEWS EDITOR

BLACK MOON MOTHER
Illusions Under The Sun
"Doomy, riffy shoegaze with ethereal vocals "
VANESSA THORPE
PRODUCTION EDITOR

ARCHITECTS
For Those That Wish To Exist
"Epic. An early contender for album of the year"
LOUISE BROCK
ART EDITOR

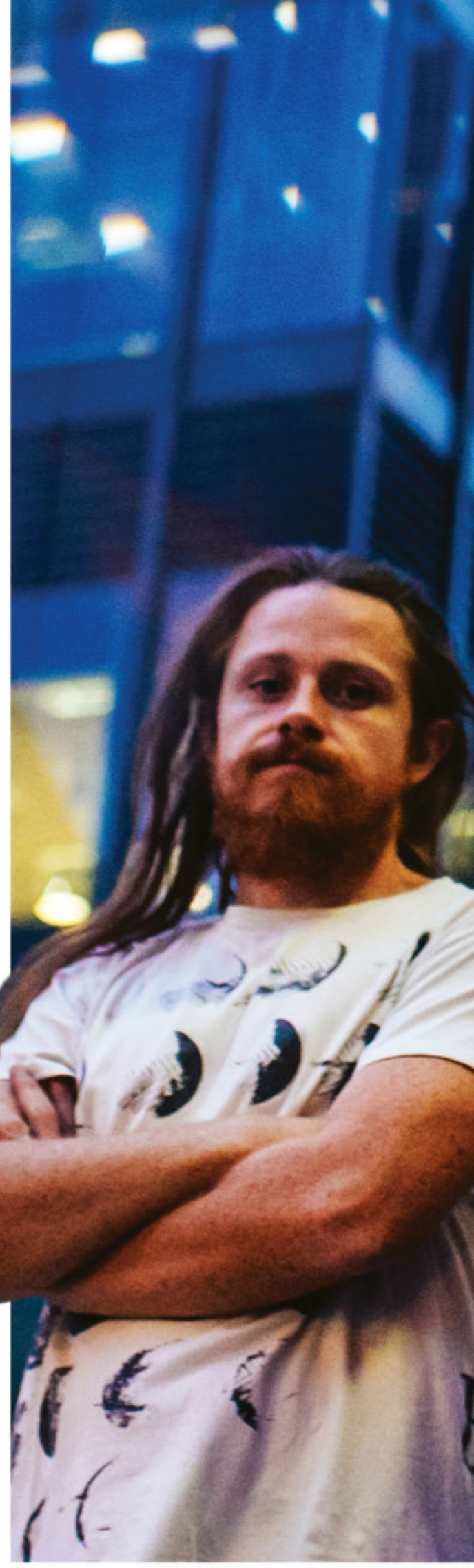
WODE
Burn In Many Mirrors
"Seriously epic black metal from Manchester"
HANNAH MAY KILROY
FREELANCE NEWS EDITOR

NEW NOISE

PUPIL SLICER

With a name like that, it's hardly gonna be smooth jazz. Meet the Londoners tearing up the underground with their savage grind/math sounds

WORDS: DOM LAWSON • PICTURE: ANDY FORD



THEIR NAME MAY make you do a bit of a sick in your mouth and their music is utterly fucking terrifying, but Pupil Slicer have gone and created the most exciting debut album in living memory. The London-based trio only formed three years ago, and almost by accident, as vocalist/guitarist Kate Davies explains.

"At first, it was all just a bit of fun. I just wrote some horrible death metal riffs that didn't fit with the band we were in at the time," she explains. "We really weren't spending a whole lot of time writing stuff, but then the original vocalist quit, and me and Josh [Andrews, drums] thought, 'Now we have this project with a funny name and we're getting offered loads of gigs for it, so what do we do now?' We thought about the music *we* like, and with us it's Dillinger Escape Plan, Converge and Rolo Tomassi, those kinds of bands. We figured we can basically write whatever we like and give it a shot."

The result of that pragmatic forward step can be heard smashing everything in sight on Pupil Slicer's debut, *Mirrors*. A ferocious trio, completed by bassist/vocalist Luke Fabian, they sound like everything all at once and nothing you've ever heard before. Mercilessly extreme, with an obvious debt to grindcore, death metal and the pitch-black hardcore of Converge, songs like recent singles *L'Appel Du Vide* and *Wounds Upon My Skin* also touch upon glitchy noise, syrupy ambience and occasional moments of spine-tingling melancholy. At times, Pupil Slicer are ruthlessly tight and destructive. At others, their skull-threatening racket sounds spontaneous and genuinely dangerous.

"I guess it's half and half," says Kate. "There are songs, like *Wounds Upon My Skin*, that were entirely jammed out. It was me and Josh, playing in a shed in his back garden, and he was doing those drum fills at the beginning and I was just riffing over it. Then I'd go back up to the computer and hopefully make a song out of it. With things like *Stabbing Spiders* or *Save The Dream, Kill Your Friends*, those are a lot more premeditated and technical. I'll write the whole thing myself and then give it to the others and they say, 'This is ridiculous!' But they learn it anyway! Ha ha ha!"

In contrast with their knowingly ridiculous moniker, Pupil Slicer have plenty of intelligence and substance that backs up the face-flaying intensity of their music. Kate is a thoughtful, softly spoken soul who freely admits to ongoing battles with depression and anxiety. Although primarily poetic and metaphorical, the lyrics on *Mirrors* clearly come from a sincere, heartfelt place. Meanwhile, the sheer brutality underpinning them sounds like a euphoric act of catharsis.

"It's a very personal album and there *is* a lot of catharsis involved," Kate states. "I don't want to directly write about my own experiences because that can be a bit too exposing, so I've written in such a way that's it's more vague, but *I* can directly connect things in the lyrics. At the same time, I've tried to make it so the lyrics have a more general meaning, about society at large or problems going on in the world. In a way, it's about anxiety in general, so the songs can be about my specific experience, but someone with anxiety or depression can find some other way to connect to it."

As a result, when the band are finally able to take their show on the road, the size of their crowds looks likely to have multiplied tenfold at the very least. Like everyone else, Pupil Slicer's plans for 2021 and the launch of their debut have been thrown into disarray by that pesky pandemic, but the release of

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Brutal, grinding math-metal with a bruised heart and ideas to burn

FOR FANS OF:
Converge, The Dillinger Escape Plan, Pig Destroyer

CHECK OUT:
Martyrs

Pupil Slicer: more than meets the eye

Mirrors has generated a deafening buzz in underground circles.

"IT'LL BE INTERESTING to see what the next gigs will be like, because we haven't played a show since before we got signed," says Kate. "The last gig was only 50 people and that was sick! But we're looking at festivals for next year and tours, potentially. It doesn't look like there'll be anything at the end of this year. If there *are* shows available, we'll be playing them! As soon as we can we'll be out there and playing as much as we can. We've really missed it."

Unless you have a dangerously lax attitude towards your finances, you probably wouldn't place a bet on a band with a name like Pupil Slicer becoming a huge success. But as recent times have taught us, anything is possible and the unexpected is often lurking around the corner. Kate and her bandmates have produced one of the most viscerally thrilling records any of us will hear this year. Sometimes, the daftest ideas are the best ideas.

"PEOPLE TOLD US, 'THAT'S SUCH A HORRIBLE NAME!'"

"We used to have people saying, 'That's such a horrible name for a band! Why would they do that?'" chuckles Kate. "But now we're getting people reading so much further into it. There was one guy the other day who said, 'They're trying so hard to be the most brutal thing possible!' Someone else said, 'Oh it must be a reference to *Un Chien Andalou*, the surreal Salvador Dalí film…' We *did* notice that when we came up with the name, but *after* we'd thought, 'That's a really funny name for a band!' It's a name that gets people talking either way!"

***MIRRORS* IS OUT NOW VIA PROSTHETIC**

NEW NOISE

SENYAWA

Experimental duo blend traditional Indonesian sounds with boundary-pushing heaviness

WORDS: ALEX DELLER • PICTURE: PHANTOM LIMB

IT'S RARE FOR a band to sound like no one else, but Indonesian two-piece Senyawa – vocalist Rully Shabara and instrumentalist Wukir Suryadi – achieve just that. Their unique brand of experimental heaviness sounds ultra-modern but also utterly timeless – the complex product of them growing up as teenage metalheads and having a passion for experimenting with homemade instrumentation and the desire to blend styles, sounds and dialects in homage to their country's extraordinarily rich and diverse culture. From a chance onstage meeting, the pair have forged a successful, storied career, and are now setting their sights on increasingly ambitious goals.

"We've spent 10 years looking inward," says Rully. "It's a new chapter for us, because we're going to bring our ideas to life. We have to be able to live what we're saying – the vision has turned into a mission now." While the band's aims include self-sufficiency and an archipelago-wide touring network, new album *Alkisah* forms a more immediate part of their 10-year plan. It sees sonic change (Wukir, for example, debuts a new homemade instrument called the 'Industrial Mutant' – a compact version of something he designed for a major art installation), but also a logistical gambit that will see more than 40 labels releasing the album around the world. "In a way it's an experiment to see what will happen when we release the music but let go of our own control over it," says Rully. This plan also chimes with the album's theme – of the old world being washed away and created anew.

"In our story, people know the end is coming but make the same mistakes," says Rully. "We're trying to come up with a way out of the loop. The album explores how power can be manipulated and bring destruction, but what if the power is shared? Music is the power we have, so what if we share it? We're trying to answer our own questions." MH

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Intense, glowering experimentation that looks both to the past and the future for inspiration

FOR FANS OF:
Wardruna, Acid Mothers Temple, Sunn O)))

LISTEN TO:
Istana

***ALKISAH* IS OUT NOW VIA PHANTOM LIMB**

FROZEN SOUL

Meet the Texan titans of cold-school death metal

WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PICTURE: ADAM CEDILLO

FRIGID TUNDRA AND frostbitten digits aren't usually the first things to spring to mind when it comes to Texas, but Frozen Soul are steadfast in their determination to be the coldest new thing in death metal. "Texas is having record levels of snow for the first time in my lifetime… I don't think that's a coincidence!" laughs vocalist Chad Green.

Taking their name from lyrics to Metallica's *Trapped Under Ice* (which in turn started a fixation on all things frosty), the band's full-length debut, *Crypt Of Ice*, delivers implacable, trudging riffs and an overall veneer of apocalyptic menace as though thawed from the early-90s death metal scene. But while they owe clear allegiance to the likes of Bolt Thrower and Mortician, they also bear the hallmarks of the titanic grooves coming out of their native Texas. "We wouldn't be anywhere without our local scene," Chad admits. "We released our demo in 2019 and our friends went to bat for us, helping to push us where we needed to be. Power Trip, Creeping Death, Devourment, Kombat, Cognizant and Imperial Slaughter are just a few of the bands that make our local scene amazing!"

Widespread touring remains on ice for the foreseeable future, but that hasn't stopped the band from hosting their very own *Creepshow* meets *Headbangers Ball* themed livestream in *Wrecking Ball Metal Madness*, an indicator of their colossal ambitions. And naturally, rather than stumping for pyro, they went ahead and got a snow machine to enhance their live shows. "Actually, now we have two!" Chad laughs. MH

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Power Trip grappling in a life-or-death battle with Morbid Angel

FOR FANS OF:
Bolt Thrower, Obituary, Creeping Death

LISTEN TO:
Wraith Of Death

***CRYPT OF ICE* IS OUT NOW VIA CENTURY MEDIA**

THE HYENA KILL

After almost giving up, these alt-rockers turned painful experience into a dark, expansive new sound

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Dark, riff-driven alternative rock that often descends into full-blown metallic chaos

FOR FANS OF:
Failure, Deftones, Nothing

LISTEN TO:
Close Enough

"WE HAD BASICALLY split up; we'd done this for a while and we really thought we'd come to the end," The Hyena Kill guitarist and vocalist Steven Dobb tells *Hammer*. "I wrote one more song for something to do one day, and it was so different to our usual sound that we felt like we had to try and push on."

Steven was inspired to start writing again as a type of catharsis during what he describes as "a period of real unhappiness". Rather than splitting up, the band ploughed on and produced their new, second album, *A Disconnect*, which is far darker, heavier, denser and more complex in both sound and mood than their previous releases.

"These songs are a reflection of what I was feeling: genuine anger, rage, pain," he says. "It's hard, I don't really want to go back into that period again, I don't really want to think about that time. But these songs just pull me back there, they feel like the best, most personal and most complete set of songs we've ever written."

The new songs' expansion on the more rudimentary punk rock of their past work has meant that the former duo, Steven alongside drummer Lorna Blundell, have been joined full-time by bassist Charlie Seisay and Sam Jones on guitar and synth.

"We asked the guys into the studio to help us beef up the songs," Lorna says. "Once we started playing them we knew we had to recreate them live in the same way. We couldn't have done that as a duo, and we want to play everything live. This is a fresh start."

***A DISCONNECT* IS OUT NOW ON APF**

STEPSON

Meet the young Brisbane crew making metalcore exciting again

WORDS: YASMINE SUMMAN

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
As if 2000s post-hardcore and emo had a lovechild

FOR FANS OF:
Counterparts, Holding Absence, Alesana

LISTEN TO:
Deeper Sleep

PRESS/MICHIGANDER: PRESS/KRIS HERRMANN

"WE WERE READY to pull the trigger, had the release ready, then the world shut down." Stepson had bagged gigs with the likes of While She Sleeps and Stray From The Path, and signed a deal with SharpTone Records. Then COVID struck. "It felt like our dream was being ripped away," says bassist and vocalist Jayden Ridley. "When in reality, it was just being delayed."

The Aussies describe themselves as a "mixed bag", taking in influences from KSE to Taking Back Sunday. Their debut album, *Help Me, Help You*, is now getting its release and, as the title suggests, the band are all about uncut honesty. "For us, everything is super-personal, otherwise it just doesn't feel authentic," Jayden explains. "Just listening to a song, knowing that you're not alone and being able to relate – it's like a cruel, conflicting comfort in a way."

Jayden has to pinch himself about signing to SharpTone. For him, bands on the label are making music exciting again. "The hardcore/metalcore coming out now is some of the best shit that's come out *ever*," he says. "Metalcore got boring for a while, but it's back in full force. I'm so stoked for the new music coming from Australian bands."

***HELP ME, HELP YOU* IS OUT NOW VIA SHARPTONE**

IN THE KNOW

What your favourite bands are listening to

MICHIGANDER

"I stumbled upon Michigander randomly while listening to an Apple Music radio station. While they don't have a proper full-length at this point, I've had their five-song EP, *Where Do We Go From Here*, on heavy rotation. The songs can have a melancholy undertone while still being infectious. I feel like Michigander picked up where Coldplay left off when they decided to become a full-blown pop band. This EP has really struck a chord with me."

JB BRUBAKER, AUGUST BURNS RED

HOARD ALMIGHTY

Box sets, underground oddities and all the essential merch you need this month

BODOM AFTER MIDNIGHT

PAINT THE SKY WITH BLOOD EP: DELUXE BOX SET

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THE DEATH OF Alexi Laiho last December robbed heavy metal of one of its most flamboyant and gifted exponents. His passing was particularly cruel, as the iconic Finn was poised to relaunch his career with Bodom After Midnight – and on the evidence of the band's new *Paint The Sky With Blood* EP, there was a lot more face-ripping, fret-melting bombast to come. To get the full experience, this limited edition Deluxe Box Set version is pretty much unbeatable. Alongside a digipack edition of the EP, Bodom diehards also get a 150 x 100cm flag, a Bodom After Midnight pendant, an art print of Alexi and a photocard of the whole band. *Paint The Sky With Blood* is also available in two different 10-inch vinyl variants, which are practically guaranteed to be collector's items. Snap them up now and salute a metal god.

https://napalmrecords.com/bodom-after-midnight

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https://tinyurl.com/crewl-tee

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£21.99

Does what it says on the bottle. Looks like it's been siphoned from the river Sytx. It's 20cl of 40% black vodka with less a hint, more a huff of chilli. Comes in a snazzy gifting tube to enact revenge on enemies.

https://tinyurl.com/regret-vodka

QUÉBEC METAL BOOK

£22.99

Finally available for non-Francophiles, this labour of love charts the history of Québecois metal, tracing the scene's roots from garage rock, prog and punk through to legendary acts like Voivod and Gorguts. C'est formidable!

https://tinyurl.com/quebec-metal

TWISTED SKULLS FLEECE

£27.99

Maintain maximum snugglitude while wrapped in a shroud of pure shrieking death! This blankie promises to keep those draughts at bay, while the gaping jaws and cavernous eye sockets couldn't get any more ghoulish.

https://tinyurl.com/skulls-fleece

CLAW SKULL RING

£19.50

Many metalheads feel like they're walking hand in hand with death every day. If that sounds like you, why not be *literal* about it and have this stainless steel skeleton hand clinging to your favourite digit?

https://tinyurl.com/skullclaw-ring

BRITISH FOLKLORE MAP

£14.99

Britain: birthplace of Aleister Crowley, hobgoblins and rumours about the kid at your school who climbed the fence wearing a ring and got his finger ripped off. Learn 1,400 more devilish details in this beastly tome.

https://tinyurl.com/folklore-map

HOLDING ABSENCE BOXSET

£79.99

The Cardiff post-whatever band's new record is available in this deluxe package, hoovering up a gold LP, CD, seven-inch hardback photo book, locket pendant, cassette and signed letter. Hardly an absence of stuff here.

https://tinyurl.com/ha-boxset

DEVIL CAT PATCH

£4.99

Confirm your status as a cat cuck with this stylish, no-bones-about-it ode to feline supremacy. There may also be a ritual involving Felix chunks, but we're not privy to that sort of sensitive informeowtion.

https://tinyurl.com/devilcat-patch

EYEHATEGOD T-SHIRT

£15.55

Smother your pores in NOLA filth and rep for Eyehategod's latest sonic stool sample, *A History of Nomadic Behaviour*. Perhaps cover up the bit with the bum on it if you're at the shops, mind.

https://tinyurl.com/ehg-tee

AVENGERS WHISKEY DECANTER SET

£15.26 - £134.49

After a long day spent battling the forces of evil, every superhero deserves to put their boots up and have a tot of something nice. Why not make it an *occasion*, and indulge in this Avengers-themed gift set?

https://tinyurl.com/whiskey-endgame

SLIPKNOT FUNKO! POP ROCKS VINYL

£13.99

Everyone's favourite conversationalist, knob-twiddling Craig from Slipknot, is now available as a wee trinket. Keep him in the box though, because he'll be worth something one day. And he might take your eye out.

https://tinyurl.com/craig-pop

MYLES KENNEDY BOX SET

£60

Give your turntable a spectral aura with this special glow-in-the-dark edition of the Alter Bridge frontman's latest solo endeavour. Alongside the luminous vinyl, this limited box set includes an EP, pendant and art print.

https://tinyurl.com/myles-boxset

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NAME: RAMMSTEIN
AUSGABE: MUTTER

How Mutter Changed The Game

With two albums under their leather belts and the gag between their teeth, Rammstein had a point to prove. Twenty years on, this is how *Mutter* made them megastars

WORDS: ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

The headline screamed, 'Nazis? Heil no!' This wasn't one of the usual outrageous tabloid rags, though – this was a mainstream UK music publication. Why? The year was 1998 and a band had used footage of Leni Riefenstahl's 1938 film, *Olympia*, in their latest music video – a cover of Depeche Mode's *Stripped*. While originally created as propaganda for the infamous 'Nazi Olympics', the movie is now routinely name-checked as a vital moment in cinematic history. But the band in question were German, sparking fears of fascism.

It was Rammstein: the Berlin six-piece who'd lived under hardline socialist rule in the German Democratic Republic. The staunchly liberal band. The band with the fire. The band with the dildos. But Britain didn't know all that yet…

"We are not Nazis, Neo-Nazis, or any other kind of Nazi," said the band emphatically in a statement quoted in the piece, stating that the footage was used as an example of good art. "We are against racism, bigotry or any other type of discrimination."

It was a strange start for a band who were about to embark on an effort to win over Britain. "They were convinced it would never happen in the UK," says Anna Maslowicz, the PR guru who took Rammstein under her wing a year or so after that headline. "The first time I met them, I said, 'You're gonna be playing stadiums in the future.' And they said, 'Never. We'll never be accepted here. We sing in German.'"

That admission seems surprising in light of how things were going for the band. While their debut album, 1995's *Herzeleid*, flopped onto CD players and was met with a somewhat flaccid reception, it caught the ear of Nine Inch Nails' Trent Reznor and filmmaking legend David Lynch – they loved it so much, two songs ended up on Lynch's 1997 neo-noir cinematic nightmare, *Lost Highway*.

Album Nummer zwei, *Sehnsucht*, booted the door down later that year. Its lead single, *Engel*, reached No.3 in the German singles charts. Up next was *Du Hast*, now a setlist staple, which somehow became a US radio hit and pipped The Smashing Pumpkins to a heavy rotation slot on MTV.

They were playing to thousands of devotees in mainland Europe and blowtorching a serious reputation across the pond. Thorsten Zahn, former editor of German alternative magazine *Visions* and the current editor-in-chief at *Metal Hammer* Germany, was sold hook, line and sphincter from day one. But as Rammstein hunkered down to make the album that would become *Mutter*, a seed of doubt sprouted in his brain: how could the band exceed expectations again?

Richard takes out the eyebrows of the first eight rows

"Everyone was afraid which direction they'd go next," he says of the band's Deutsche fanbase. "Everyone was nervous that the third record would turn out bad."

There was one man who definitely wasn't nervous: Jacob Hellner.

The Swedish producer had already worked with the band on *Herzeleid* and *Sehnsucht*, and would continue to produce every record save for 2019's self-titled. He remembers the mid-1999 gestation period of Rammstein's defining chapter.

"[With] how the music world worked back in those days, your third album would define whether you were there to stay or just a flash in the pan," he explains. "They realised that, and even though they'd had massive hits with *Sehnsucht*, they still had the bravery to follow their artistic instinct and go where they went.

"They rented Haus Weimar in Heiligendamm, a small town by the Baltic Sea," he continues. "It was a hangout for the East German political top brass, and in those days, it was really worn down – they rented the caretaker's house. The whole foundation of the album was laid out in that house."

Aside from the presence of a minor celebrity – the German Shepherd who played Hitler's dog in 2004's *Downfall*, if you were curious – these sessions were unremarkable and workmanlike. The next year saw Rammstein road-test pretty much the entire album at a fan club gig in Berlin, before recording the tracks in France's Studio Miraval.

Musically, it was a definite swerve from the hyperactive, videogame-ish industrial metal of albums prior. *Mutter*'s grandiose chuggery was accentuated with the help of the Deutsches Filmorchester Babelsberg, whose swelling strings run through the title track, *Mein Herz Brennt* and *Nebel*.

Ollie Riedel, Christoph 'Doom' Schneider, Christian 'Flake' Lorenz, Till Lindemann, Richard Z. Kruspe and Paul Landers ponder oversized Christmas crackers as a merch idea

GETTY

PRESS/OLAF HEINE

Jacob had a very specific, very German target in mind for the sound: Richard Wagner. But there was nearly a cock-up.

"I've always had a soft spot for when they did that kind of drama, which was possible in the slower and mid-tempo stuff – there was more space to really go into those colours," he says. "The orchestra was a high and low point at the same time. We'd been recommended someone to transpose it – these notes by the cellos, these by the violas, and so on. We had this enormously expensive orchestra come into this enormously expensive studio [Studio Saal 1, Berlin], and when they started to play the music, it just sounded strange. Really awkward. We were so fucking stressed out, and not until we'd done that for two or three hours did we realise that this transcription guy had changed stuff – he'd changed the arrangements! We convinced the orchestra to come back the next day, and the guy spent all night redoing it."

"THEY WERE CONVINCED THEY'D NEVER BE ACCEPTED IN THE UK"

ANNA MASLOWICZ, FORMER RAMMSTEIN PR

Once recorded, Jacob mixed *Mutter* alongside Stefan Glaumann and hashed it out with the band, often for hours at a time. "The post-production discussions became quite heated, with various camps – me included – taking sides and trying to convince the other half whether a particular track should be included or not!" Jacob laughs. "That's their strength. They can have these never-ending discussions and end up with Rammstein."

The focus fell on acoustic-sounding percussion locking into those regimented, mechanical riffs – something else Jacob appears to have had a hand in.

"Composition-wise, Jacob is a very important key in the chain – that was a role not many people got to see, except the band," says Ronald Prent, the mixing engineer responsible for Rammstein's core sound on *Herzeleid* and *Sehnsucht*, who also oversaw preliminary *Mutter* mixes in June 2000. "The band has great ideas, great riffs, and Till [Lindemann, vocals] writes amazing lyrics and controls the

German language like no other… but Jacob was the common denominator that brought it together into a song."

Speaking of the German language, on the run-up to *Mutter*'s release, Anna was preparing a proper push for Rammstein's PR campaign in the UK. Before this, the band had only played one UK show, at London's Powerhaus in 1997. Essentially a pub, the venue bore witness to Till taking the stage with laser goggles before setting himself on fire. One publication gave it three out of five. Rammstein needed someone to give a shit.

"At the start, they did all the interviews using a translator," says Anna. "Christoph and Paul [Schneider and Landers, on drums and guitar respectively] came over and did interviews. People felt a bit uncomfortable, so I explained that English wasn't their first language, and it shouldn't be a hindrance – they shouldn't not be able to do press because they can't speak perfect English. I think, because of that piece [with the Nazi headline], they didn't want to be misunderstood or misquoted.

"The only hard bit was persuading people about interviews with a translator," she continues. "People were aware of them, but they hadn't really come to the UK and done anything. People needed access to them – be exposed to them – for them to progress in the UK."

On April 2, 2001, *Mutter* was born. The baffling, *Snow White*-themed music video for lead single *Sonne* had been doing the rounds on music television, and before anyone could fully sink into *Mutter*'s musical embrace, they had to look at *that* cover. Photographed by German couple Daniel and Geo Fuchs, it frames the vulnerable, heartbreaking image of a dead foetus preserved in formaldehyde.

"The cover was a big scandal in Germany, as everyone said, 'You cannot show a dead baby!'", recalls Thorsten, who'd just started as editor at *Metal Hammer* Germany. "Then they said, 'Well, is it really dead? Is it not dead? Are you allowed to show a dead baby on the front cover of a major record?'. Then you saw the photos of all the guys in the liquid too. This was something that they directed. They wanted it. They're a magnet for provocation."

No matter what people thought of the artwork, *Mutter*'s sonic content was too explosive to deny. As with every Rammstein record, it comprises 11 songs – they sprint across a 45-minute run-time, spattering the music and lyrics further across the canvas than

Weirdly, when *Futurama* put heads in jars, it wasn't nearly as controversial

ever before. The riffs hit harder, the vocals more commanding, the drums punchier, the keys dripping with sorrow and silliness in equal measure. It was Rammstein 2.0, and with *Ich Will*, *Feuer Frei!*, *Sonne* and *Links 2 3 4*, it had absolute tunes for days. Irrefutable proof that they had more in their locker than just *Du Hast* and a worn-out strap-on.

"Fucking hell, it is… bangers," says Winston McCall, vocalist of Parkway Drive – a band whose fire-fuelled live show is indebted to the Germans' onstage chaos. "I'm hooked from the word 'go'. *Mein Herz Brennt*, as an opening track, sets the tone so well. The grandness straight-up, the strings coming in straight away, then the female vocalisations coming in the whole way through the record, tying it with that whole *Mutter* theme – it's fucking genius."

For Winston, an Australian, the maternal theme is more apparent through the music. But for Thorsten,

PHOTOGRAPHY: DANIEL AND GEO FUCHS. IMAGE TREATMENT: FORMGEBER.

Where there's smoke, there's fire: Till Lindemann onstage in the Netherlands, December 2001

and German listeners at large, *Mutter* was more than thematic – its effect was profoundly literal (see A Labour Of Love, p.44). "A record called *Mutter* – 'mother' – is a pretty strong expression," Thorsten elaborates. "[Most people] have a very special relationship to their own mother, and if you like this band and the sound they put on a record called *Mutter*, all of a sudden you have a special relationship to this record.

"The diversity of the songs made this pretty intense," he continues. "*Links 2 3 4*, that's where they show their political views – they do left-wing lyrics with a marching military beat. When Till sings *'Sie wollen mein Herz am rechten Fleck / Doch sehe ich dann nach unten weg / Da schlägt es links / Links'* [translated loosely as 'They want my heart on the right spot / But then I look below it beats left there / Left'], for a German audience, it is crazy to hear. Then you look down at yourself and see that your heart too beats at the left side. Everyone's does."

Elsewhere, the band venture into gentler territories – the aforementioned title track and *Nebel*, the record's coda, achieve the melancholy balladeering the band hadn't quite nailed on previous outings. For the latter, Rammstein re-enlisted Bobo: the singer whose syrupy vocals made *Engel* such a hit four years prior (see "I was touched by its timeless beauty", right). Here, though, she's slight – almost hidden, an Easter Egg for anyone listening properly. After banging your head and thumping your thighs like Till does onstage, it's almost a relief… until you cotton on to what the song's about.

"It's a fog in the morning, and it's about this relationship between two older people," says Thorsten. "She will obviously die, and this is the last kiss

"ARE YOU ALLOWED TO SHOW A DEAD BABY ON THE COVER OF A RECORD?"
THORSTEN ZAHN, *METAL HAMMER* GERMANY

GETTY. BOBO: STEFANIE MARCUS

"I WAS TOUCHED BY ITS TIMELESS BEAUTY"

German singer Bobo reveals what it was like to sing on dark closer *Nebel*

HOW DID THE BAND APPROACH YOU FOR NEBEL?
"In the early 90s, I was playing with my indie rock band, Bobo In White Wooden Houses. They'd already invited me to sing the female part on *Engel*, which was when we began to record together – it was just meant to be the bridge of the song, and then developed into a repeating chorus. When they recorded *Mutter* a few years later, they asked me into the studio again to try some different lines."

THE ROLE YOU PLAY ON *NEBEL* IS VERY DIFFERENT TO *ENGEL*. HOW MUCH DIRECTION DID THEY GIVE YOU?
"The whole recording was just an enjoyable, positive flow. Three takes and we had it. Jacob Hellner always used to say, 'Let's see where we end up.' I like that kind of approach – it gives you the spirit of freedom. But at the same time, they had a very clear idea of what kind of mood or flavour they wanted to add to their music. For *Nebel*, they asked me to do some high atmospheric sighs, and [when] we sang in unison in the chorus, I found a second voice. I still love that song, and for me it's one of their best. Till probably wasn't in the studio when I recorded; I guess he was too polite and wanted to let me do my work in peace!"

DID TILL EXPLAIN THE MEANING OF THE LYRICS TO YOU?
"No, he didn't explain anything, reticent as he is. It is a song about love and death. Until death will tear us apart. The lyrics reminded me of German Romanticism, almost mystical, with a classical feel and spirit in between the lines. Listening to it again now after such a long time, I was really touched by its timeless beauty."

she will get from him. It's so intense – you can really cry to it."

Mutter was more significant than just a piece of plastic on a CD deck or turntable. Sure, reviews were a bit middling, and people still used Nazi puns that went out of fashion at the same time as the Third Reich. But the album instantly topped the charts in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Of its five (five!) initial singles, *Ich Will* and *Feuer Frei!* crept into the UK Top 40. Clearly, somebody liked it. For the fans, this was the moment Rammstein became more than just a band – they were now something you had to consume, experience, live and breathe. It was a phenomenon the press couldn't ignore any longer.

"I've never had so many industry people blag tickets off me for shows," laughs Anna, who has counted the likes of Nine Inch Nails and Blink-182 as PR clients. "We concentrated on the rock press for the actual interviews, but for the live shows, we went, 'Right, let's invite the *NME*, let's invite all the broadsheets.' And the reviews were just amazing – 'You'll never see a show like this, it's next level.' It's so much more than a live show."

Covering more than 100 dates between May 2001 and July 2002, the Mutter tour brought Rammstein's musical step-up to life, flinging them from theatres to arenas in most territories. Kitted out with lifeless tiles to conjure images of an old-fashioned, East German delivery room, the show started with the band's keyboard player, Flake, at his instrument.

"We'd had an old dentist's chair repurposed for me to use as a keyboard stand, and I wore a white doctor's coat," he writes in his book, *It's The World's Birthday Today*. "Tom [Morawetz, the band's long-term tour assistant] came up with the idea of pinning a blood bag to it. Lord knows where he got hold of that."

From there, he started fingering the ghastly opening to *5/4*, one of *Mutter*'s criminally overlooked B-sides. A massive, red, pulsating uterus descended from the venue's ceiling.

Wait, what?

"I designed a huge uterus that they came out of," LeRoy Bennett, an A-list lighting and production designer, told *Hammer* in 2019. "The birthing canal they were coming out of was a tube that was used for escaping out of a fire, and it had fireproof webbing on the inside that zig-zagged through it. Normally you'd have clothes on while going down it, but because they were coming through in diapers, their skin would get web-burned, so we had to cut the tube short so they could slide out easier."

Dressing for the occasion: Rammstein backstage at the MTV Europe Music Awards on November 8, 2001

"*MUTTER* WAS LIKE A NEW DEFINITION OF HEAVY"

JOCKE SKOG, CLAWFINGER

It was a swerve into the absurd on an unprecedented scale, larger than life and completely one-off. Just six years prior, they'd supported Swedish rap metallers Clawfinger in 500-capacity clubs. Now Rammstein's fortunes had changed, they returned the favour and offered the Swedes a support slot.

"When *Mutter* came, it was like a new definition of heavy," says Clawfinger's co-founder and keyboard player, Jocke Skog. "We only realised [how popular Rammstein had become] when we came to the first show of the tour and saw this incredible, huge spaceship theatre going on, and it was to, like, 20,000 people! They told us, 'We've put 80% of all the money we make back into this tour.'

"They had huge bangs going on – we could feel it when we were sat eating in catering," he details. "It was like an old American action movie with bombs, explosions and absolutely no plot. I've

GETTY.

Toasty! Our favourite pyromaniacs on 2001's Pledge of Allegiance tour supporting Slipknot and System Of A Down

always been a tech geek too, and they had two full-sized Apple computers, with one for backup. We were standing in one of those 20,000-capacity venues, you can hear the birth of the band, then suddenly it's pitch black. Silence, for 30 seconds. We looked at each other like, 'Holy fuck, the computer died!' The audience was like, 'Are we supposed to clap now?' Then suddenly, *Mein Herz Brennt* starts. I asked what the fuck happened, and they were like, 'Yeah, the first computer broke, then the second one broke, so we had to restart the whole thing – fuck the intro.' One guy was still hanging from the uterus, ha! It was like, 'BLACKOUT, REMOVE EVERYTHING, GET THEIR CLOTHES ON!'"

Hold-ups in the ute-chute aside, the *Mutter* tour seemingly went off without a hitch. Even the postponement of Rammstein's much-hyped London show couldn't dent their momentum – the local authorities pulled their gig at the 2,000-capacity Astoria at the last minute due to safety concerns, but it was rearranged for later in 2001, with 5,000 bums on seats at Brixton Academy. The album only peaked at #86 in the charts, but you can't stand between the British public and a concert where the singer pretends to spunk all over the keyboard player.

"After that first media run, they never looked back," says Anna. "The UK embraced them."

Everything was finally happening, until it wasn't. A September/October US tour supporting Slipknot and System Of A Down was cut short for Rammstein, due to inter-personal tensions compounded by the 9/11 terror attacks. Richard Kruspe, the band's guitarist, actually saw the second plane hit. Flake packed his bags and headed home mid-tour. "We totally slipped into this wave of hysteria, and I found the frenzied atmosphere very frightening," he said in 2015's *Rammstein In Amerika* documentary.

They didn't return to North America for nine years, and in that time, their legend grew there as it did around the globe. Because Rammstein are the only band to have ever done this – to make a success of uncompromising, industrial, German metal filtered through a transgressive, performance art lens. It's best suited for Berlin bondage dungeons, not Olympic stadiums. So why were they playing *Feuer Frei!* in the opening scenes of blockbuster movies like *xXx*, warming audiences up for two hours of shit-housery with Vin Diesel?

"As far as *Mutter* goes, it is sloganeering done to fucking perfection – every chorus is literally, like, a line," says Winston. "Everything about it is made to get into your brain, and it's pounded in there by riffs that are fucking relentless. There's always a lot of tongue in cheek with whatever Rammstein do, of course there fucking is, but this is the one where the seriousness of the art can't be fucked with. That, accompanied by dudes shitting flames out of their faces."

In 2021, it's still watertight. Peter Tägtgren, the producer who's worked with everyone from Immortal to Amon Amarth, Children Of Bodom and Till ▶

GETTY.

Till in 2001, helpfully demonstrating the 'shitting flames from their faces' technique

"IT'S DUDES SHITTING FLAMES OUT OF THEIR FACES"

WINSTON MCCALL, PARKWAY DRIVE

Lindemann himself, cites the record as a lesson in how the genre should sound. The singles are regular rock club staples, and still occupy a sizeable chunk of the setlist whenever Rammstein drag their macabre monolith of a show on the road. It's endlessly replayable: the jewel in the band's kinky crown.

Thorsten puts their success down to camaraderie. "They stayed together like a family," he concludes. "Like best friends. Nobody from the outside can bring anything between them – they do everything by their own rules. They're doing these super-huge pyros you never thought of in a stadium, artwork you never thought possible, lyrics people would go to jail for – you know what I mean? They try everything. No borders."

Alles Gute zum Geburtstag *Mutter*. Happy birthday, *Mutter*.

RAMMSTEIN ARE SCHEDULED TO TOUR THIS YEAR. FOR UPDATES, SEE RAMMSTEIN.DE/EN/ AND METALHAMMER.COM.

A LABOUR OF LOVE

Oxford university lecturer Dr Alexandra Lloyd takes us through the deep lyrical content of *Mutter*

"*Mutter* ('Mother') takes us on a journey from cradle to grave, stopping off to take in love, sex and politics. There are references to German literature throughout Rammstein's songs, and *Mutter* is set in the world of the 19th century – a time when the idea of children as innately innocent came to be established; when the Brothers Grimm collected fairy tales rife with violence, oppression, and suffering. It was also the heyday of Dark Romanticism and the Gothic, exploring the supernatural, evil and the grotesque. It is the stuff of children's (and adults') nightmares."

"First track *Mein Herz Brennt* ('My Heart Is Burning') begins by quoting *Sandmännchen*, a German children's TV show. The Little Sandman of the title is from a much older story, best known in its 19th-century retelling by ETA Hoffmann. In this version, he steals children's eyes. *Spieluhr* ('Music Box') is based around the Gothic preoccupation with being buried alive. *Feuer Frei!* ('Fire At Will') plays with different meanings of fire, including the proverb 'gebranntes Kind scheut das Feuer' ('the burnt child dreads the fire', or as our tamer English version has it, 'once bitten, twice shy'). The lyrics of *Sonne* ('Sun') have nothing to do with fairy tales (it was originally written as a Russian boxer's entry music), but in the video the band serve a drug-addled Snow White."

"There's also a lot of sex: the perfunctory kind in *Rein Raus* ('In, Out'), and total self-love in *Zwitter* ('Hermaphrodite'). *Nebel* ('Fog'), features echoes of poets Friedrich Hölderlin and Bertolt Brecht. Read the title backwards and you get 'Leben' ('Life'). *Links 2 3 4* ('Left 2 3 4') famously addressed accusations that Rammstein were neo-fascists and plays on Brecht's *Einheitsfrontlied* ('United Front Song'), written to rally and unite left-wingers after the Nazis took power."

"The title track is most rooted in the world of the Gothic and the fairy tale. Mothers are absent, children abandoned. We meet a figure 'conceived in hate and without seed/semen', without a belly button (like Adam), never suckled. It might be a comment on human cloning, or the bandmembers' own relationships with their mothers. There are also echoes of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, originally published with the subtitle 'The Modern Prometheus', referring to the original pyromaniac who, in Greek mythology, defied the gods by stealing fire. Rammstein's shows use grandiose fire effects and the word 'fire' is among the most used in their lyrics."

"The song's narrator is fixated on his absent mother: he both yearns for her and wants to poison and then drown her. The creature has a birthmark (literally a mother's mark: 'Muttermal'), sometimes seen as referring to ex-USSR premier Mikhail Gorbachev: indeed, the tortured relationship between offspring and parent has been read as a symbol for East Germany and/or Mother Russia. Given that *Mutter* came out a decade after German reunification, this makes sense – even more so after you see the video for 2019's *Deutschland* and its focus on German identity. That video also links directly to this album, when a piano version of *Sonne* plays over the end credits."

"All these ideas make sense, but Rammstein's lyrics are not there to be decoded. Like good poetry, they are open, and you bring your own experiences and ideas. I can't listen to *Mutter* – and especially the line '*In ihren Lungen wohnt ein Aal*' ('an eel is living in her lungs') – without thinking about Günter Grass's 1959 novel *The Tin Drum*, in which the central character's pregnant mother dies from eating grotesque quantities of fish, after she sees eels swarming a dead horse's head on a beach. *Mutter* leaves you with the sense that, sometimes, the nightmares begin when you wake up."

GETTY. DR ALEXANDRA LLOYD: PRESS.

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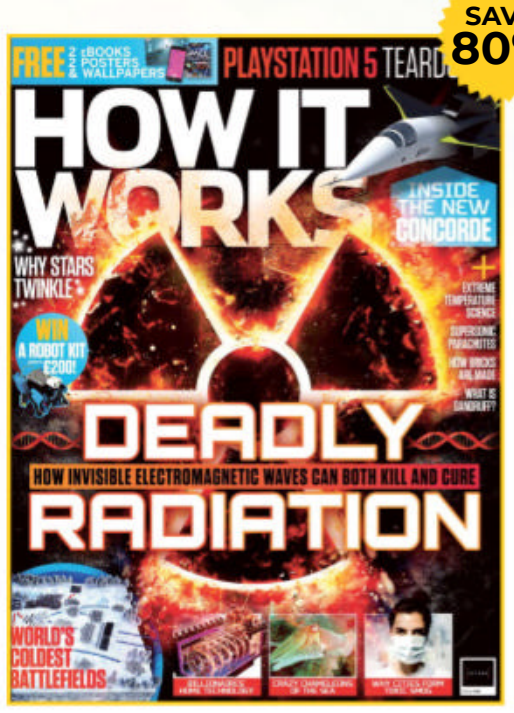

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EVANESCENCE HAVEN'T RELEASED A 'PROPER' ALBUM FOR 10 YEARS...

... and yet it's been the busiest and most turbulent decade of Amy Lee's life. Long-awaited new record *The Bitter Truth* was born from honesty, tragedy and a life well lived

WORDS: POLLY GLASS • PICTURES: NICK FANCHER

Evanescence (left to right): Jen Majura, Tim McCord, Amy Lee, Will Hunt, Troy McLawhorn

Like so many performers with a strong, specific public image, Amy Lee is not all she seems. Ostensibly her world is one of gothic melodrama and opulent metal. Basques and ball gowns. It's what she's been known for since 2003, when Evanescence's mega-hit *Bring Me To Life* made her a superstar at 21.

Her next ambition, though? It might surprise you…

"Y'know what would be really cool?" she says over our Zoom audio call, in chipper tones. "I've always thought it would be fun to be a part of creating the score to a great nature documentary, like *Planet Earth*, one of those amazing David Attenborough ones, underwater particularly. Every time I watch something like that I think, '*God*, it'd be fun to work on the score for that!'"

Now 39, Amy is a woman of many sides. The oddball child of the grunge era and poster girl for nu metal, who owes as much to Nine Inch Nails and Björk as her old classical flame, Mozart. The compulsive busy bee with two pianos in her house and heaps of keyboards in her home studio. The chatty mother of one and former New Yorker, who moved to her current Nashville base just before Covid hit.

Here, she's kept herself sane by writing, gaming and cooking, rather than sitting passively in front of Netflix. "I get anxious!" she chuckles. "I mean, I'll play a videogame for four hours straight but I'm doing something, y'know? I have a say in what's happening! I'm just a person that needs to keep my hands busy, to some degree."

There are media-savvy edges to her warmth. In conversation she's unfailingly sweet but holds a certain amount back, glossing over some points with the polite but firm ease of someone who's been doing interviews her entire adult life. Not to mention the philosophical but bullshit-free manner of a successful woman nearing 40, who's weathered her share of speculation and 'Sexiest Female' awards.

"Ha ha! Erm yeah, no comment there!" she laughs, a warning note coming into her voice, when we ask if it's helped having a qualified therapist in the house – husband Josh Hartzler – during these weird times. "What's helped is having a supportive husband. He really has helped just be there to support me and do the dirty work, and do a lot of dishes and all the stuff that piles up."

In the end, much of Amy's 2020 was filled with work on Evanescence's long-awaited fifth album, *The Bitter Truth*. Working again with producer Nick Raskulinecz (Mastodon, Halestorm, Code Orange), they have been drip-feeding singles to the public and now, finally, the full record is done. A rich, heavy smorgasbord of all the classic Evanescence ingredients

– muscular nu metal riffs, punchy electronics, lush orchestral layers and colossal, gut-grabbing tunes – it was worth the wait.

Seeds of some songs go back as far as 10 years, but the bulk began to germinate on tour in 2019. After 2017's *Synthesis*, on which they reworked previous material with orchestral arrangements, the band were ready to record again.

"We went back to that same room where we wrote a lot of the songs for our [2011] self-titled album, and just got together in a circle, plugged in our stuff and started jamming. What headspace were we in? Feeling no pressure that we *needed* to do something, but just that we *wanted* to."

Recording began at Nick's Nashville studio in early 2020, until the pandemic hit and sent everyone packing. As people started to gingerly emerge from their homes, the band reassembled in Nashville when it was safe to do so. Bassist Tim McCord, drummer Will Hunt and guitarist Troy McLawhorn all stayed in tourbuses, while guitarist Jen Majura collaborated remotely from Germany.

"MY BROTHER IS ALL OVER THIS RECORD"

AMY LEE

For Amy in particular, it marked the culmination of an eventful decade in which she wrote music for films, made an album of children's music (2016's *Dream Too Much*) and reconvened with Evanescence for the aforementioned *Synthesis*. And, of course, the band continued to tour. Still, the question 'Why 10 years?' has featured consistently in recent interviews with the band. How does she feel about being asked that, at this point?

"The question is interesting because it assumes that I am the girl from Evanescence, and that is what I do, and it was only ever gonna be a matter of time before I came out and made another album," she muses. "That's just not really real life. I am very proud of all that we've done and it's a huge part of my life, but I've always had an open mind about whatever the next chapter might be."

Emotionally there have been significant highs and lows. Amy became a mother (her son with Josh, Jack, was born in 2014). There were "major tragic losses" among her bandmates. News outlets began buzzing when she filed a lawsuit against their old label, Wind-Up, amid rumours of unpaid royalties and other allegations.

"I don't want to spend too much time talking about the business struggles," she says when we bring it up, "for a lot of reasons. But I just

PICTURE: CREDIT

want to say that I think people might think, from the vague way that I talk about it, that there was this one label and they were so bad; it's really not that simple. It's about the people around us, the people working with us, the people representing us, a whole lot of… housecleaning that needed to be done."

Real tragedy, however, came in 2018. Following long-term struggles with severe epilepsy, Amy's brother Robby died at the tragically young age of 24. Listening to *The Bitter Truth*, it's hard not to interpret much of it – the lyrics (*'I don't know if I'll be alright, but I have to try'* in *Broken Pieces Shine*), the orchestral swells, the heartbreaking melodies – as an expression of grief.

"All over it," she says simply, of her brother's presence on the record. "He's all over it."

To really understand Amy Lee today, it helps to go back to her formative years. The oldest of five siblings, all of whom learned an instrument, she fell in love with the piano and from there delved into a mix of styles. The family moved a lot, settling in Arkansas when Amy was in her teens. Her attic bedroom there was a haven of hard rock, alternative music posters and dolls. It was here where she started writing songs.

"I had that [Pearl Jam] *Ten* poster with all the guys with their hands up touching," she remembers, "and this big Kurt Cobain poster of him in the white glasses, and I remember having a Down poster that I ripped out of a magazine 'cos it was like, 'Look how *cool*!'"

The posters have gone, but the dolls still live in her studio (you may have seen them behind her on the band's recent *Jimmy Kimmel* live stream). "I've always kinda kept them as my mascots to remind me like… the way it looked when it all began."

Her father, a radio DJ and multi-instrumentalist from Florida, was her earliest musical influence. "He's like me in that he'll just get inspired by something he likes and *have* to learn it," she says. "I remember when I was a teenager the movie *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* came out, and he just decided he was gonna learn how to play the banjo and… *god*, all the siblings, I just remember us being like, 'Durrghhh!' Ha ha ha! It was *hours* of loud banjo, we were always asking him to go play outside!"

Guests at the Lee household were entertained by the family, cajoled by their father into giving performances of Beatles and Neil Young classics, among others. "It was so dorky and embarrassing!" she guffaws, before pausing. "But I look at the pictures and look back on it and it was so precious."

> **"I HAVE ALWAYS KEPT MY DOLLS AS MASCOTS"**
> AMY LEE

Understandably, Robby's death brought it all home in a major way. "It changes you," she says, "it really does, when you lose someone that you love so much. It's not something that heals, it's not something you get over. It's a part of you now. You have to learn to live with the new you. A big part of who I am is being a big sister and having him in my life, that's just part of my identity. So to have to look at this big part of yourself and go, 'OK, that part of me is gone… or is it gone, and what does that mean?'"

It's not the first time she's had to grieve the death of a sibling. Amy's sister Bonnie died suddenly at the age of three, which she poured into early Evanescence tracks. The loss of Robby in adulthood, however, has been a different thing to process. "We had a life together," she explains. "We knew each other for years. He's part of who I've been since I was 12 years old."

She tells us it's brought her family closer. Playing the album to her parents, over Christmas, was a powerful moment. "I just took 'em out here and we listened to the whole thing. It felt really good to do. There were a few tears shed."

At this point, she's ready for life as we knew it to restart. Ready for shows, travel, seeing her fans and, erm, guacamole competitions on tour. "I'm a purist! Mine is totally smooth and it doesn't have tomatoes or onions or anything chunky going on…"

She chatters on about her recipe, painting a cheerfully everyday picture of life in a world-conquering metal band – far removed from the epic sounds and luxury production values she's known for, and from the heartbreak that shaped *The Bitter Truth*.

With nothing to prove as she concludes her 30s, and a thirst for the next chapter (whatever that might be) Amy Lee could do anything. She might surprise all of us. "Time is short and important," she says thoughtfully, "and you think about your life and the things that are really important, and sometimes it's a really hard choice, because we have the opportunity to do something so amazing, and yet at the same time… how incredibly amazing is it to have a family? How precious is that? So you have to weigh your time."

***THE BITTER TRUTH* IS OUT ON MARCH 26 VIA BMG**

TRUTH TO POWER

Nick Raskulinecz, the production guru behind 2011's *Evanescence*, reveals the secrets behind *The Bitter Truth*…

HAD YOU MET THE BAND BEFORE YOU PRODUCED THEIR SELF-TITLED RECORD IN 2011?
"I hadn't. I'd never even seen Evanescence play live. I was familiar with their music on the radio and stuff like that, but when I met Amy for the first time we just really hit it off; we had a lot in common musically and it was like, 'Well shit, you're cool, let's hear what you got!' So we listened to the demos and I was like, 'Fuck, this is great!' Amy's got really eclectic taste."

THERE'S A LOT GOING ON IN *THE BITTER TRUTH* (ELECTRONICS, KEYS, ORCHESTRAL LAYERS…). DO YOU ENJOY THE CHALLENGE OF PULLING SO MANY ELEMENTS TOGETHER?
"Oh definitely. I love music and I love creating with people who aren't afraid to try things they've never done before. That's the cool thing about working with someone like Amy; she's not afraid to try anything, man. This record is a good blend of electronic and beautiful and vibey, and it's got some of the heaviest most rocking shit she's ever done."

WHAT WAS THE MOOD IN THE STUDIO LIKE, AFTER A 10-YEAR BREAK?
"It felt like we took a month off, or something. I remember all of us going, at various points, 'It feels like we never stopped!' That energy and that creativity was still there. To be honest with you, I had no idea if we were gonna make another record again. I really didn't. I didn't know where her head was at."

DO YOU HAVE A FAVOURITE TRACK ON THE ALBUM?
"I love *Better Without You*; it's a perfect example of her [Amy] taking a chance. She's got an undeniable sound, she's a career artist. You know it's Evanescence before she even starts to sing, like with the Foo Fighters, Korn, Alice in Chains, Rush… Those are all career bands. They make records for their fans, not the radio."

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Amy Lee: nothing to prove

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Angry Critics, Secret Auditions And The Exit Of Paul Di'Anno: Inside Killers

After their debut shook metal to its foundations, Iron Maiden needed something big for a follow-up. But there were some significant challenges ahead...

WORDS: DAVE LING

PRESS/IRON MAIDEN HOLDINGS

IRON MAIDEN

For a very particular type of Iron Maiden fan, the first two albums are all they will ever need. Even today, social media throws up the occasional keyboard warrior claiming Maiden lost their edge on the day Paul Di'Anno left – or worse, that the recruitment of Bruce Dickinson transformed Steve Harris and company into something that was, gasp, *too heavy metal.*

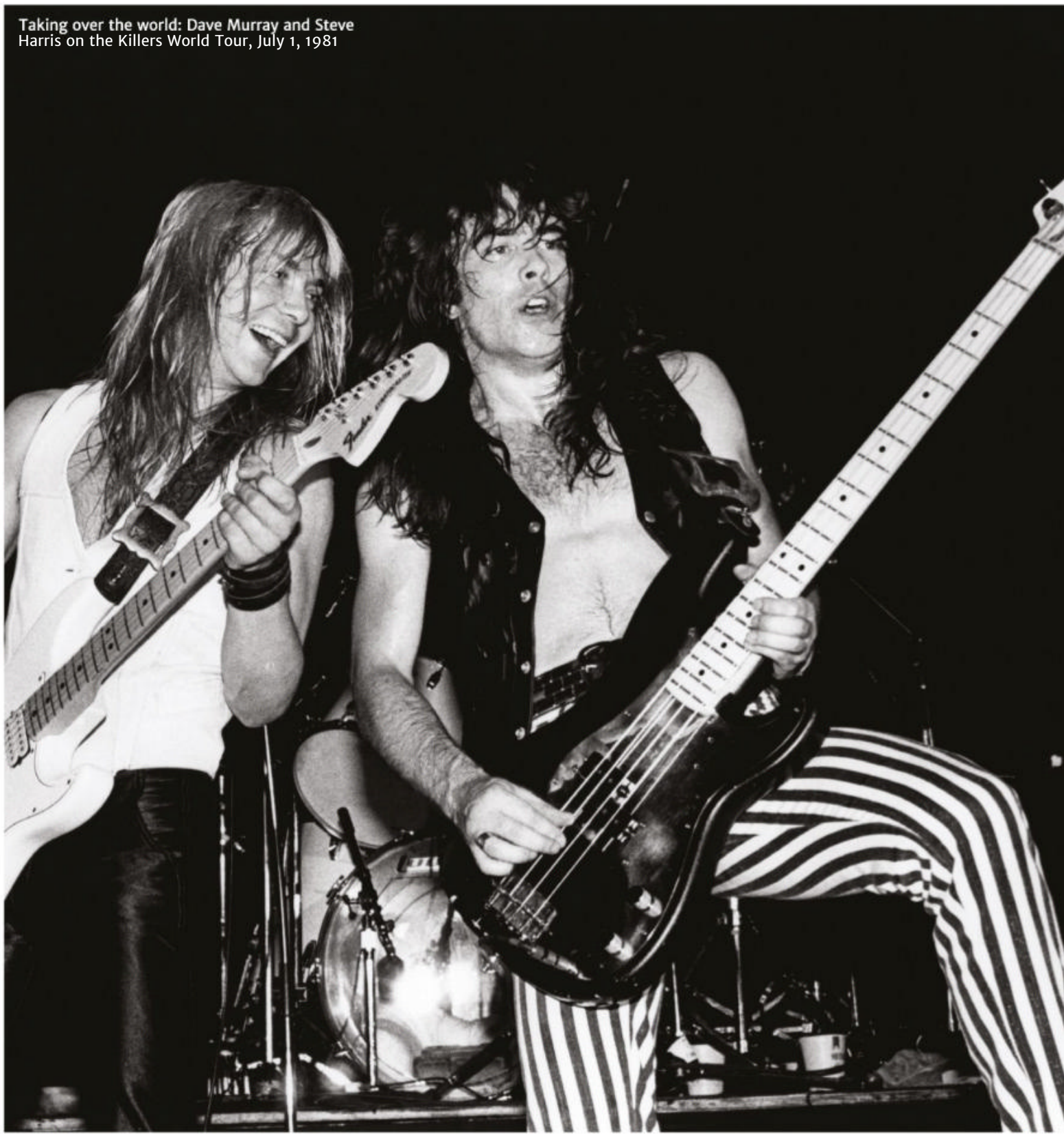
There's no denying that something a little bit special departed with Paul, but the livewire singer is the first to admit that he would never have stayed the course within the confines of Iron Maiden.

"I don't blame them for getting rid of me," Paul told *Hammer* last year. "Obviously, the band was Steve Harris's baby but I wish I'd been able to contribute more [to the writing]. After a while, that got me down. In the end I couldn't give 100% to Iron Maiden anymore and that wasn't fair to the band, the fans or to myself."

His words only tell half of the story. Paul was an exciting yet wildly unpredictable frontman, prone to acts of gross daftness (such as famously boasting to headliners Judas Priest that his band would blow them offstage during a vital support tour). However, those first two albums remain world class, and it's no wonder that they are still so widely loved. And yes, Maiden *did* become a different group during Bruce's first reign. They had to. He was a dedicated professional, sworn not only upon climbing to the very top, but willing to make sacrifices to do so. Paul, however, was a different beast.

Despite a less-than stellar production that Paul himself dismissed as "complete dogshit", *Iron Maiden* had taken the band into the Top 5 of the UK album charts. With guitarist Dennis Stratton now replaced by a certain Adrian Smith for the next chapter, two immediate problems loomed: Firstly, how to build on their debut album's production and achieve the sounds that Steve Harris aspired to, and secondly, what to do about Paul?

When considering producers the first time around, Martin Birch had topped the band's shortlist but was busy cutting *Heaven And Hell* with the Ronnie James Dio-fronted Black Sabbath. A Rolls-Royce in his field, the Englishman had also made records with Maiden's heroes Deep Purple, Rainbow and Wishbone Ash. Birch would later recall that when the band finally contacted him regarding the album that became *Killers*, they had told him: "We didn't think we were worthy of you. Because of what you've done [in the past] and your reputation, we didn't think you would take us on." He replied: "That was your first mistake, because I was very disappointed that you didn't ask me." A lasting bond was sealed: as well as *Killers*, Birch would go on to handle every Iron Maiden album up to *Fear Of The Dark*. For Paul Di'Anno, though, *Killers* would prove to be his Maiden swansong.



Taking over the world: Dave Murray and Steve Harris on the Killers World Tour, July 1, 1981

"I COULDN'T GIVE 100% AND THAT WASN'T FAIR TO THE BAND"

PAUL DI'ANNO

"Something, somewhere had changed," Paul would write in his autobiography, *The Beast*, of the *Killers* era. "The music was becoming more polished and more commercial. We'd lost something of our punk-type edge. To my mind, [it was] getting a bit too arty-farty."

Maiden's direction would ultimately carry them to heavy metal immortality, but if there was a little uncertainly around the new material from the band's growing fanbase, it was that… well… a lot of it wasn't actually all that *new*. Many of the songs that ended up on the final version of *Killers* had already been performed onstage for some time – in fact, two of *Killers*' songs, *Innocent Exile* and beloved hit *Wrathchild*, were getting played in Maiden sets in the mid-70s. Plus, *Wrathchild* had actually already been

EBET ROBERTS/GETTY IMAGES

Metallers on the Rue française:
Iron Maiden in Paris, March 1981

VEUIGE/DALLE/ICONICPIX

"WE HAD GOOD SONGS AND DIDN'T WANT TO LOSE THEM"

STEVE HARRIS

officially released previously, on EMI's New Wave Of British Heavy Metal sampler, *Metal For Muthas*, in 1980, though it was unquestionably an inferior version. Even *Drifter*, during which Paul would go all-out to get the crowd singing along, had been another staple of their shows for several years and was a firm fan-favourite by the time it was committed to tape. Put simply, for many pre-existing Maiden fans, *Killers* simply didn't *feel* like a new album. Luckily, Martin Birch's production gave the songs a whole different lease of life.

"Production-wise, *Killers* was like chalk and cheese compared to the first album," Steve noted in the official Iron Maiden book, *Run To The Hills*. He also acknowledged the lack of brand new material on the album, but argued it was nonsensical to deny such good songs a proper release: "The first album was like a 'best-of' from our live set, songs which went back years. [For *Killers*], we still had a lot of really good, strong songs, like *Wrathchild*, and we didn't want to lose them."

There was also some controversy with the press. *Sounds*, a major music magazine who were credited with the power to make or break careers, had got firmly behind Maiden's debut, calling it: "Heavy metal for the 1980s, its blinding speed and rampant ferocity making heavy rock of the 60s and 70s sound slothful and funeral dirgey by comparison." The review was a big seal of approval from a major player in the music industry, and helped stoked the fire of the rising NWOBHM. *Killers*, however, was received rather differently, as reviewer Robbi Millar – who had reportedly dated Paul – gave it a less than warm response.

"Maiden have never really cut it on vinyl," she noted. "Hold on a minute, haven't we rather overrated this lot?" she added, before posing the controversial question of whether the debut "might have crashed into the charts at the Number Four position with a little help?"

Maiden were unimpressed with the review, aggrieved at the response to

Paul Di'Anno: a great talent but too wildly unpredictable for his Maiden comrades

EBET ROBERTS/GETTY IMAGES

Iron Maiden (left to right) in 1981: Steve Harris, Clive Burr, Paul Di'Anno, Adrian Smith and Dave Murray

what they said was "an early cut" of the record with an unfinished production. All five members of the band gathered for an interview with *Sounds* soon after, conducted by a slightly more sympathetic writer in Garry Bushell (even if he admitted he actually preferred the first record himself). While Paul Di'Anno was in particularly boisterous mood ("I've got the right asshole with Robbi Millar!" he exclaimed), Steve Harris was a little more diplomatic. "I thought she was being constructive [about the choice of songs], but the claims of hyping were so out of order," he noted. "She was implying that the first album was [artificially assisted] into the chart, but hype can't make it go silver. You can't hype 63,000 people to buy it. It's also gone gold in Japan, was it hyped there too?"

While *Killers* would debut on the UK charts at a relatively disappointing No.12, it would still propel the band forwards and set the foundations for the all-conquering run their 80s output would pick up from there. Forty years later, it remains rightly regardless as a classic.

Despite all this, Paul just wasn't destined to last the course. His drink and drug intake worsened and, in September 1981, the singer was dismissed "on a totally amicable basis" following a trek of more than 120 gigs in 15 counties, "different attitudes towards the music and touring" being the official company line.

"THE CLAIMS OF HYPING WERE OUT OF ORDER"

STEVE HARRIS

We all know what happened next. Following a secret audition, Bruce Dickinson of NWOBHM rivals Samson won the job of fronting the band, and the following year Maiden released a third album, this time comprised of all-new material. It was called *The Number Of The Beast*, and it would change heavy metal forever. Still, whether you're a very particular kind of Maiden fan or not, one thing is certain: *Killers* marked the end of an era, and Iron Maiden would, quite simply, never be the same again.

FOR MORE ON IRON MAIDEN, SEE METALHAMMER.COM AND IRONMAIDEN.COM

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Another Life

Things you might not know about Paul Di'Anno

1. HE HAD A BAND CALLED...WAIT FOR IT...KILLERS!
They released two studio albums in the early 90s. Turns out Paul didn't totally leave *Killers* behind after all...

2. HE REFUSED TO GROW HIS HAIR WHILE IN IRON MAIDEN
"I was one of the rare singers in heavy metal that didn't have long hair," Paul told *Hammer* last year. "I dressed how I felt. Had I wanted to wear a kaftan and sandals then I'd have done so – but I never did."

3. HE BECAME A MUSLIM, AND THEN CHANGED HIS MIND
Although Paul often contradicts himself in interviews, it's known that during the 1990s he turned to Islam. He later stepped away from religion.

4. HE ANNOUNCED HIS RETIREMENT... AND THEN CHANGED HIS MIND
Paul decided to end his career in 2013, and then backtracked. He was due to make a final live performance at last year's Beermageddon Festival, but the show was axed due to Covid-19.

5. A DOCUMENTARY ABOUT HIM IS BEING FILMED
It's being made by Wes Orshoski, who co-directed 2010's *Lemmy*. The results are unlikely to be dull.

THE HAMMER INTERVIEW

SERJ TANKIAN

He's just released an eye-opening personal documentary, but how much do you really know about System's mainman? We sat down to talk through his incredible life story

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY

PRESS/ARMEN KELESHIAN

It was late at night and pouring with rain when Serj Tankian had what he calls his "epiphany". Serj was in his mid-20s and had been working for his uncle's jewellery business since graduating from university, playing music on the side. But he wasn't happy, so he had decided to study to become a lawyer.

He was making the long drive from Downtown LA to night school in Long Beach when his subconscious took over. He slammed on his brakes and started hitting the dashboard, yelling: "I want to do fucking music, fuck all this shit."

"Becoming a lawyer was a very negative thing," says Serj today. "I fucking hated lawyers. But I always say that I had to go to the far extreme of who I shouldn't be to shake myself into the realisation of who I am."

His roadside meltdown was a tipping point. Within a few months, he had joined a young Armenian-American metal band named Soil, who would eventually mutate into System Of A Down. More than a quarter of a century on, the 53-year-old is one of modern metal's most charismatic figures, a multi-hyphenate singer/artist/activist whose career has been punctuated by both political controversy and ongoing intra-band drama with the rest of System.

"This is what I've learned as an activist within the music world," he says, as he prepares to look back over his life. "It's very easy to be truthful when public opinion is on your side. It's incredibly difficult to be truthful when it's not."

You were born in Beirut, Lebanon in 1967. What's your earliest memory?
"I guess my earliest memory would probably be my grandparents' house, which was down the street from our house. Them looking after me, as families do. The stairs leading up to the street, the beach, the first time I went to the beach…"

Civil war broke out in Lebanon in 1975. You've talked about hearing bombs dropping. What was that like as a young kid?
"At that age, it's really hard to process. I could only make sense of it as an adult. I have a six-year-old right now, and he plays with little toy planes and jet fighters. He says, 'Why are they called jet 'fighters', why are they different from the other planes?' And I say, 'Oh, because they're used in war.' And he's, like, 'What's war?' That just floors me. How am I going to explain war to a six-year old? Because war is so illogical."

Your family left Beirut for the US soon after. What are your first memories of America?
"Ha ha! American cheese. It's so yellow. And bell bottom jeans – it was 1975, man. It was a culture shock, going from Beirut, Lebanon to Hollywood, California. It was a completely different language. I knew a little English, but it took me a year or so to catch up."

When was your sense of injustice instilled in you?
"It was at quite a young age, my early teens. It was the realisation of living in a democracy like the United States, which had tabooed the recognition of the [Armenian] genocide for political expediency and economic reasons, because Turkey was a NATO ally. It made me extremely cognisant of the fact that there are so many truths out there that are being undermined and traded for other nefarious purposes. That made me an activist."

"HOW AM I GOING TO EXPLAIN WAR TO A SIX-YEAR-OLD?"

SERJ TANKIAN

What was the worst job you had growing up?
"I've done many things. I worked in the shoe-manufacturing business with my dad, I sold shoes, I worked in the jewellery business with my uncle, I've owned my own software company. Maybe shoe sales wasn't the best job, but I was a teenager working in a little mall and there were lots of beautiful girls there. But if I ever went back to my past, I wouldn't change anything – every single experience made me who I am. How can I regret anything?"

You started out as a keyboard player in the band Forever Young, before becoming an incredibly distinctive singer. Where did you find your crazy?
"I must've found my crazy in Soil, even before System Of A Down. It was such crazy, heavy, progressive music that it kind of unlocked something within me in terms of expression. But by no means was I a great singer at all. I was just expressing myself, screaming half the time and trying to sing half the time. I didn't even know what I had to say, but it came."

Was it tough getting System Of A Down off the ground?
"It was hard work. A lot of labels were very reticent in signing us: 'Who's going to play this music on the radio?' We never thought about it. We just made the music that we made, 'cos that's what you do as an artist. We were touring endlessly for the first few years. I don't remember being home. But it was more fun for me. Any time you're working your vision and you're in the right place at the right time, it's going to be fun. 'Cos the universe is conspiring with you, right?"

You had Rick Rubin in your corner early on. What do you recall about making your first album with him?
"I remember Rick's idea was, 'You guys are so crazy onstage in terms of sound and dynamics, I just want to record it as it is, as live as possible.' That first record definitely makes you feel like you're at a live show. And we worked with [Tool producer] Sylvia Massy, who was our engineer at the time. We had a star team. We were in amazing hands."

You were due to play a free show in a Hollywood parking lot the day before your second album, *Toxicity*, came out, but it ended in a riot. What was that like?
"We were so stressed. We expected 3-4,000 people and 15-20,000 showed up. We were at a club across the street, where we were going to prep to play. And they came to us and said, 'The Fire Marshal is not allowing the show to happen because the barricades have broken. They're gonna close the show.'

"We tried to convince the police to let us go play, even if it was just a few songs to calm everyone down. They said, 'Absolutely not' and threatened to arrest any of us trying to make it to the stage. I got the guys together and went, 'Fuck 'em, let's go and do this, let them arrest us. Who cares?' And my lawyer grabbed me and said, 'This is LA, they will sue the fuck out of your band, take everything you have.' I was thinking, 'I'm doing fucking music, this is not how it should be.' I mean, shit, we inadvertently started an LA riot, and we didn't even do anything."

Toxicity was at No.1 when 9/11 happened. A few days later, you posted an essay on System Of A Down's website called Understanding Oil, which looked at the reasons why the attacks happened. You got death threats for being 'unpatriotic'…
"It really backfired. It wasn't just death threats. They were talking shit about what I had said on *The Howard Stern Show*, mischaracterising my words and intentions, so I had to get on and defend myself. This was right at the beginning of our tour – we were on the news on a daily basis, there's terrorist

threats all over the nation, we're playing in front of 20,000 people a night. Are we safe? Are they safe?

"I remember John [Dolmayan, System drummer] asking me, 'You're a smart guy, what the fuck are you doing? Are you trying to get us killed?' That's literally what he told me. I felt so bad. I love these guys and here I am touring with them, and I'm like, 'I'm so sorry – it's the truth, I swear it's the truth.'"

You've been a vocal critical about the Turkish government's refusal to acknowledge the Armenian genocide. In the *Truth To Power* documentary, you claim there was a Turkish intelligence plot to assassinate you. Really?

"We had a protest in front of [then-US speaker] Dennis Hastert's office, and my security detail had a few friends in the FBI. They basically told him that they were looking into Turkish intelligence interests 'looking at your client'. I don't want say death threats, assassination, but that's what happened.

"That was even more pressure now. Onstage, I was fucking moving like I've never moved! I wouldn't be in the same position for more than two seconds. I lost weight on that tour.

"But look, the way I see it is, what are my other options? Not speaking the truth? And then, am I an artist or am I a musician? No, I had no choice. I'm still so naive to believe that the truth should overcome."

Did success go to your head at any point?

"It's a business made for the ego, but this is where my previous life came in. I didn't start playing music at the age of eight and it was the only thing I ever dreamed of. When someone would come up to me and go, 'Hey baby, you guys are the best thing since sliced bread', I was always, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah, whatever.' I didn't buy into the hype. It helped me keep my sanity within that egotistical world."

System went on hiatus in 2006, which was largely down to you. Were you thinking, 'That's it, I'm done with System.'?

"I didn't know what the future held, but I did know that I wasn't completely done with System. If I wanted to leave, I would have left – there was no gun to my head. A successful band becomes a machine – it becomes a cycle.

Serj wants justice for all

PRESS/GEORGE TONIKIAN

Hmmm... it's not that hard to imagine Serj as a lawyer, is it?

I wanted time to do my own things, I was bothered by some of the internal dynamics, etc. So I went off and made solo records, I started writing for orchestras. When I came back to System, I came back as a more confident songwriter, as someone who had done other things. To me, that's more useful to add to the value of the group."

System reunited in 2010. Has all the drama surrounding the band in recent years overshadowed the music?
"Never. Show me a band that doesn't have drama, and I'll show you a shitty band. There'll always be drama – we're four individuals who feel different about different things. But the press has played it up, and it's kept the band in the limelight irrespective of our lack of making a record for 14 or 15 years.

"We put out two songs for Artsakh [2020's surprise-released *Protect The Land* and *Genocidal Humanoidz*], which to me is one of the best things we've ever done as a band, in terms of reaching beyond ourselves. And I'm extremely proud of my brothers in System Of A Down that we were able to accomplish that. But yeah, you know, the drama's gonna be there, always."

It seems pretty intense being Serj Tankian. Do you ever get the urge to just pour a big slug of Jack Daniel's and crank up Mötley Crüe to shut out the world?
"Ha, no. My method of dealing with things is meditation as much as possible, just slowing things down. For the last couple of months, I've been dealing with extreme back pain, a herniated disc – I just had surgery a week ago. This is the result of being overwhelmed by many things – the war in Artsakh, seeing a number of young people die, trying to be helpful, and it feeling like it's not enough. You know how in music you should never take yourself too seriously? As an activist, I might have taken myself a little too seriously. Pain is a good teacher in that sense."

What kind of movies do you like to watch?
"I like films that go over the top. I like a good British gangster movie – any Guy Ritchie movie, *Gangster No.1*, *Sexy Beast*. To me, those are the funniest movies – they start with a normal script and then shit just goes over the top: 'This can't be real!' I'm a pacifist mostly, but those movies are hilarious."

Have you had any acting offers?
"I get offered acting roles all the time. Anything from the typical heavy metal, demony type of thing to proper dramatic roles, but it's just not what I'm interested in. My good friend Ilya Naishuller [who directed the video for Serj's single *Elasticity*] said, 'You need to act, man.' I'm, like, 'Fuck no, I don't want to act. I can't remember lines unless I'm singing them.'"

You're a singer, a composer, a poet, a filmmaker, an activist. Acting aside, what *can't* you do?
"Never tell a kid he can't do anything."

What would have happened, all those years ago, if you hadn't pulled your car over to the side of the road and had your epiphany?
"I'd be a miserable lawyer, probably." H

"IF I WANTED TO LEAVE SYSTEM, I WOULD'VE LEFT"

SERJ TANKIAN

SERJ'S *ELASTICITY* EP IS OUT NOW VIA ALCHEMY RECORDINGS/BMG. *TRUTH TO POWER* IS OUT VIA OSCILLOSCOPE LABORATORIES/ LIVE NATION PRODUCTION

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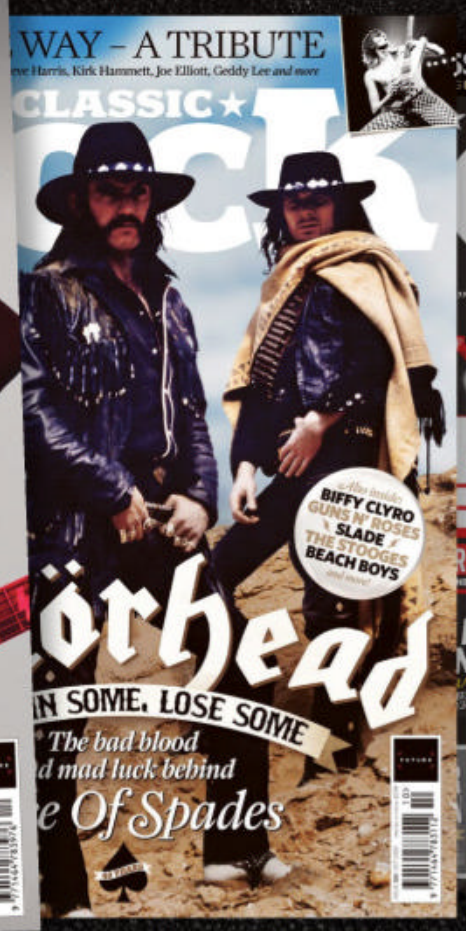

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"I DON'T THINK BE SCARED OF

"PEOPLE SHOULD DYING"

From heroin addiction, to Hurricane Katrina, to the liver disease that could have been fatal, Eyehategod's Mike IX Williams has survived it all and lived to tell the tale

WORDS: ALEX DELLER • PICTURES: TRAVIS SHINN

EYEHATEGOD

Cockroaches, so the legend goes, would be the only living thing to survive a nuclear apocalypse, scuttling up from the rubble while whatever's left of humanity continues to cook on the pavement. Somehow, we can imagine Mike IX Williams, frontman of legendary New Orleans sludge band Eyehategod, crawling out alongside them to survey the destruction. He's managed to push through everything life's thrown at him, from the death of friends and family members through to liver failure, heroin addiction, jail time and natural disasters.

Speaking from his NOLA home, Mike spools information out a little at a time, genially and with disarming candour. Memories and anecdotes that would be crushingly painful for most people to recount are carelessly discarded, and the frontman views his history of bad choices and self-sabotage with a wry, dark humour.

While synonymous with New Orleans, Mike was raised some 800 miles away in High Point, North Carolina – known as 'the furniture capital of the world'. This short chapter of his life came to a tragic close when the loss of three family members left him in the care of an older brother. "My mom was in a car accident when I was like nine years old," says Mike. "Two years later my dad died, I think of heart failure. Then one of my brothers died by suicide. He was getting involved in some kind of criminal activity – no one would really tell me."

The move to NOLA as the 70s drew to a close was instigated by Mike's older brother who'd always loved the city, and while the cause of the relocation was traumatic, the change of scenery at least seemed positive. "I was from a very small place so there was definitely a sense of having to navigate this huge city," says Mike. "But it was also exciting, I felt more free. Even at that age, I kinda felt it was what I needed and had been looking for."

NOLA also coughed up an intoxicating new music scene. A young Kiss adept, Mike discovered punk while scouring music magazines featuring his heroes. Initially switched on by the extreme aesthetics of bands like the Sex Pistols, the Ramones and The Damned, his interest caught fire when he heard the actual music. "I knew right then and there that this was it," he says.

Eyehategod (left to right): Mike IX Williams, Jimmy Bower, Aaron Hill, Gary Mader

It certainly didn't hurt that this brash, angry music raised the hackles of his older brother. "I should actually give my brother credit, because he took me to see my first shows – not because he was a fan, but because he worked this club called Jed's. There was a local band called The Normals, and he'd take me to see them – that's when people were still pogoing and had safety pins in their cheeks," he remembers.

If this is all starting to sound rather too cheerful, it was also a difficult time for the Williams brothers' relationship, with rebellion and revolt playing an increasing part in Mike's life. "I was doing shitty things," sighs Mike. "I was skipping school, failing on purpose, hanging out with the bad kids. My brother had never been in this situation before, so I do feel bad for him. He put me into a boys' home. I didn't like it at first, but I actually loved it after a while because I made a lot of friends there. It was all kids like me – juvenile delinquents. The boys' home actually kinda helped me in terms of social skills, but it also taught me how to be a better shoplifter."

"HEROIN WAS EVERYWHERE, SO OF COURSE I WANTED TO TRY IT"

MIKE IX WILLIAMS

After a couple of years in the home, Mike moved back in with his older brother, but rebellion was a constant theme – even down to faking teachers' notes so he

could play gigs with his first punk band, Teenage Waste. "I ended up being like, 'Fuck it, I'm not coming back' by the time I was 16," says Mike. "Most of the time I had friends who would let me stay at their house, but sometimes I was on the streets."

Drugs, like music, helped fill a void and blot out the shrill whine of reality. NOLA's party town atmosphere turned Mike onto booze and weed at an early age, with LSD and ecstasy soon following. It wasn't until Eyehategod was well underway, however, that things took a darker turn. "When I moved to New York in the early 90s, heroin was everywhere, so of course I wanted to try it," he says. "It was partly me thinking, 'Yeah, I've got this under control' but at the same time not really caring what happened. Not wanting to die – that probably came later in my life – but just not worrying about tomorrow."

In a sick twist, it was the devastating horror of 2005's Hurricane Katrina that ultimately helped Mike beat his decade-long addiction. Relatively unaffected by the storm itself, his Lower Garden District neighbourhood became a warzone when residents of harder-hit neighbourhoods came to take what they needed to survive. "There was a dead body round the corner from me," recalls Mike. "I saw someone pulling an ATM down the street, chained to the bumper of their car. Things got pretty hectic."

Leaving a situation that he credits with giving him PTSD, Mike was arrested on drug charges a few days later in nearby Morgan City. Thrown

"CLIVE BARKER WROTE TO ME"

Mike might howl like a blowtorched dog, but he's an erudite guy and published author. He explains how literature has influenced him

When did you discover your love for language?
"I always enjoyed reading and art. When we got to New Orleans I didn't have a lot of friends, so I spent a lot of time at the library. That was my place to go to disappear."

What attracted you to writers such as William S. Burroughs and Charles Bukowski?
"I discovered Burroughs from music magazines – he was associated with the early punk scene, with Patti Smith. I liked the abstractness of his writing. Bukowski probably influenced me more, because he showed me poetry doesn't have to mean flowers and puppies – it can be about reality."

Is it true you're also a fan of horror writer Clive Barker?
"I've always been attracted by that transgressive style. I mean, Stephen King's cool and all, but he's writing about a dog or a car – Clive Barker took things to a very strange level. He actually wrote me a letter in like '89 or '90, after I sent him a bunch of writing. It was pretty cool that he took the time to encourage me."

Have you always enjoyed literary outliers and outcasts?
"I've always liked that stuff, even back to the Dadaists and the Situationists – these movements that said you can make art any way you want, that it doesn't have to be the same boring shit all the time."

in jail and with no access to the methadone with which he'd been trying to wean himself off heroin, Mike had no choice but to go cold turkey. "The people in jail could care less," is his stark response, when asked whether anyone helped him through his withdrawal. "A lot of people that work in jails are sadistic," he spits. "I think they like to hurt other people and like to see other people's misery."

While perhaps more stable, the years post-Katrina and post-addiction have not been without their traumas. Loss seems ever-present, with casualties including Eyehategod drummer Joey LaCaze in 2013, Mike's former Suffocation By Filth bandmate Champ LaRocca in 2019, and four good friends in 2020 alone. Perhaps steeled against tragedy due to early experiences of loss, Mike views himself as "pragmatic" when it comes to facing down the void that awaits us all. "I think it's definitely something in my psyche that helps protect me," he says. "I don't think people should be scared of death, it's just something that happens."

Mike, of course, has had his own brushes with the reaper – notably in 2016 when he required life-saving surgery to replace a liver destroyed by years of hard living. Despite being a painful, debilitating, uncertain time, this experience was not without rays of light. Facing seemingly insurmountable medical bills, Mike's wife launched a crowdfunding campaign to pay for his treatment. "I didn't want to do anything like that," Mike admits. "I wasn't even telling anyone I was sick – I didn't see the point."

Being self-sufficient and nihilistic by nature, it's unsurprising that Mike was reticent, but he now buzzes when recalling the groundswell of support that helped him recover. "All the people that wrote me, and donated, that was amazing and overwhelming. It kinda gives you a little hope, and makes you realise it's not so bad being alive."

Anyone worried that these sentiments might suggest Mike has mellowed just needs to spend five minutes in a room with *A History Of Nomadic Behavior* – Eyehategod's scab-encrusted sixth album. The band's deadly, Sabbath-blasted hardcore is as unsettling as ever, shining its black light on the stained cloth of humanity. The future, as Mike perceives it, revolves around continuing to survive, and is irrevocably entwined with music, art and a quest for constant creative forward motion.

"There's things out there that I don't even know about yet that I want to do," he chuckles. "I'm just trying to keep busy no matter what. Eyehategod's got some ideas for the next thing if we can just get it together. It might take us a year or three to get that thing going, but at least we have the idea. There's a lot more to do."

The unstoppable Mike IX Williams: still going, despite some impressive self-sabotage

"THE PEOPLE THAT WROTE AND DONATED… IT GIVES YOU HOPE"

MIKE IX WILLIAMS

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THE 20 BEST ALBUMS EVER

It remains metal's most gruesome, over-the-top and gloriously extreme subgenre. Here are death metal's 20 finest cuts, as picked by our rancid writers (er, no offence)

20 DEATH
SCREAM BLOODY GORE
(1987)

The album that became the epicentre of the Floridian wave and birthed a new generation of metalheads in the process. *Scream Bloody Gore* was to inadvertently provide the embryonic blueprint for what was to become the death metal genre. This gradual epiphany was predominantly due to the appearance of Chuck Schuldiner's guttural approach to vocals, the only aspect that really set Death apart from their ferocious thrash contemporaries – a genre from which he took primary inspiration. The apex of the early formative demos and line-ups, *Scream Bloody Gore* immersed their thrash roots in a fascination with horror and Chuck's grisly artistry, but its transitional nature unleashed a wild, wide-eyed energy all its own.

19 BOLT THROWER
REALM OF CHAOS
(1989)

A monument to its creators' singular vision, *Realm Of Chaos* shattered the death metal mould with a sustained assault of mid-tempo savagery that has arguably never been beaten. Aside from sounding *exactly* like a swarm of tanks powering over the horizon, songs such as *World Eater* and *Dark Millennium* upped the ante for all of heavy music.

18 SUFFOCATION
EFFIGY OF THE FORGOTTEN
(1991)

Effectively ground zero for the entire 'brutal death metal' genre, Suffocation's full-length debut stripped death metal down to bone, sinew and pulsing heart, delivering a distinctly thuggish, New York alternative to their peers' frequently ornate and complex aesthetic. Meanwhile, Frank Mullen's guttural growls on the seminal likes of *Infecting The Crypts* have never truly been topped.

Entombed: death'n'roll progenitors

PRESS. WORDS: MALCOLM DOME, DAVE EVERLEY, DOM LAWSON, SHAUN LINDSEY, SOPHIE MAUGHAN, TOM O'BOYLE

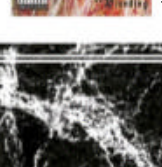
17 MORBID ANGEL
BLESSED ARE THE SICK
(1991)

After the chaotic energy rippling through their debut, *Altars Of Madness*, the second album from Morbid Angel sealed their place at the head of the death metal pack. *Blessed Are The Sick* showed the Tampa, Florida legends learning to bring a bit more control to their breakneck sound, but within the album's sputtering blasts, half-time crawl and Trey Azagthoth's luminous leads is a feast of death metal DNA.

16 ENTOMBED
WOLVERINE BLUES
(1993)

Entombed's third album divided (and still divides) fans with its rock'n'roll traits. Don't let that deter you from its devilish brilliance, though. From start to finish, this record is a bloody-knuckled bruiser. You only need to listen to songs like the hellish nightmare, *Demon*, or the oozing scab that was *Hollowman*, to realise that they hadn't lightened up in the mood department, either. This is the one that started death'n'roll and, more than 25 years on, it is still yet to be bettered.

15 CARCASS
NECROTICISM - DESCANTING THE INSALUBRIOUS
(1991)



British death metal has never had an easy ride, but back in the early 90s, these anatomically precise ne'er-do-wells were setting the deathly rulebook ablaze, outgrowing their earlier status as grindcore pioneers and imbuing their trademark sound with jolting doses of traditional metal melody and razor-sharp song structures. Bolstered by frontman Jeff Walker's darkly witty lyrics and the blistering six-string skills of both Bill Steer and Michael Amott, 1992's *Necroticism – Descanting The Insalubrious* remains a flawless monument to ingenious heaviness.

14 CANNIBAL CORPSE
THE BLEEDING
(1994)

Before parting to form Six Feet Under and taking the original band logo with him, vocalist Chris

Morbid Angel: sick puppies, and blessed

Barnes helped helm some of the most horrifyingly violent and undeniably catchy anthems in the band's arsenal. Who else could be so acclaimed for creating a song as contemptible as *Stripped, Raped And Strangled*?

13 OBITUARY
SLOWLY WE ROT
(1989)

If Death were the Beatles of death metal, then Obituary were its Rolling Stones: a dirtier, grimier, more streetwise proposition. But what *Slowly We Rot*, their momentous debut album, lacked in subtlety, it more than made up for in noise and sheer attitude. This was the ultimate horror movie soundtrack without a film: songs such as *'Til Death* and the immortal title track were explosions of viscera, instantly becoming rubber-stamped death metal landmarks.

12 DEATH
LEPROSY
(1988)

With *Scream Bloody Gore* having set a new standard in extremity, 1988's follow-up, *Leprosy*, would end up being the final nail in Death's thrash-tinged coffin. This new subgenre dubbed death metal was gaining traction, and with renowned songs such as *Pull The Plug* and *Open Casket* expanding on the fatal sensibilities for which they'd become known – savage riffs and thrash-beaten decomposition – *Leprosy* would eventually stand out as the pinnacle of their early era.

11 OPETH
BLACKWATER PARK
(2001)

A new millennium brought a new sense of urgency to Opeth's bold musical efforts. *Blackwater Park* wasn't just a career peak from a young band with the wind in their sails, it also had a profound impact on the entire world of heavy music, as lengthy, elaborate epics like *The Leper Affinity* and *The Drapery Falls* reintroduced progressive ideals and creative bravery to the extreme metal world, while acoustic reveries like *Harvest* showcased a desire to move beyond it. Full of gorgeous melodies but still thunderously heavy, Opeth's breakthrough album is widely and quite rightly revered as a landmark.

10 CANNIBAL CORPSE
TOMB OF THE MUTILATED
(1992)

The macabre album cover, despicable songtitles and an out-of-leftfield cameo in a Jim Carrey film in 1994 all added to Cannibal Corpse's notoriety, but it's the sheer quality of *Tomb Of The Mutilated* that's cemented its status. Backed by the monumental weight of *Hammer Smashed Face*'s riffs, *Post Mortal Ejaculation*'s sickening undercurrent and *I Cum Blood*'s grinding atmosphere, the band firmly nailed their grisly banner atop extreme metal's flagpole.

9 ENTOMBED
LEFT HAND PATH
(1990)

Progenitors of the now infamous 'buzzsaw' sound that set the Swedes apart from the Americans in the early 90s, Entombed had catchier riffs, a penchant for horror schlock and an underlying punkiness that made their debut album vastly sharper and more memorable than most. Not just brutal and dark, *Left Hand Path* was full of genuinely great tunes. RIP, LG.

PRESS

8 DEICIDE
DEICIDE
(1990)

Ah, good old Glen Benton. While other bands merely talked about evil, the Deicide frontman really threw himself into it full force, even branding his own forehead with an inverted cross. Deicide's debut album sounded exactly how an album made by an actual maniac should sound. *Deicide* was complex but vicious and dripping with anti-Christian vitriol. Satan bloody loved it.

7 POSSESSED
SEVEN CHURCHES
(1985)

Our Top 20 Best Death Metal Albums Ever tries to avoid bands that blurred the boundaries between thrash, death and (early) black metal, but Possessed are one of the few exceptions we had to make. *Seven Churches* is a thrash album through and through – it's just darker, heavier and more brilliantly blasphemous than anything else that existed at the time. And yes, death metal began in earnest here too.

6 OBITUARY
CAUSE OF DEATH
(1990)

The undisputed daddies of caveman death metal somehow managed to outstrip their genre-defining *Slowly We Rot* debut second time around. Aside from containing Obituary's biggest, er, hit – the indelible *Chopped In Half – Cause Of Death* remains one of the most crushing and grim death metal albums of all time. It's mainly mid-paced, but it's merciless.

Hugely influential: At The Gates in 1995

Carcass in 1993: fighting the corner for British death metal

5 AT THE GATES
SLAUGHTER OF THE SOUL
(1995)

The influence of At The Gates' mighty fourth album can be heard in a vast amount of metal from the last 20 years, not least the entire post-Killswitch Engage metalcore movement in the US. A flawless masterpiece that hammered home how distinctive the Swedes' sound was, and how brutally effective it could be. Massive tunes, terrifying levels of aggression and precision… it's an all-time classic.

4 DEATH
HUMAN
(1991)

Hot on the heels of its predecessor, *Human* undoubtedly saw an exponential leap forward in innovation. With Chuck Schuldiner surrounded by the most virtuosic collection of members in the band's history, it was no wonder this multifaceted masterpiece became Death's best-selling, and highest-acclaimed, album. Accompanied by their first music video for *Lack Of Comprehension*, *Human* saw Chuck enlist the ironically inhuman talents of Cynic's Paul Masvidal and Sean Reinert, resulting in the band gaining a well-deserved reputation as a true force to be reckoned with.

3 CARCASS
HEARTWORK
(1993)

The gore-fixated gods of grind streamlined their sound on their penultimate 90s record. The result was the finest British extreme metal album of the decade. *Heartwork* was also arguably the point where melodic DM became a cohesive idea, and the album still sounds fantastic today. Every song has at least one unforgettable hook, genius riffs come thick and fast, and Colin Richardson's production was an authentic game-changer. Melodeath may have been defined by the Swedes, but it was Carcass that made its definitive statement.

2 MORBID ANGEL
ALTARS OF MADNESS
(1989)

Rightly hailed as a landmark for the emerging death metal scene, Morbid Angel's debut, *Altars Of Madness*, set the bar so high for the entire genre that people are still trying to match its brutal splendour more than 30 years later. Back in 1989, nobody had ever heard anything like *Altars Of Madness* before. The Floridians made Slayer sound like Weezer; this was a twisted, pitch-black and incredibly sophisticated upgrade for Chuck Schuldiner's deathly blueprint. Trey Azagthoth's churning, otherworldly riffs, David Vincent's peerless growls and the band's idiosyncratic approach and progressive mindset set them apart from their peers – songs like *Chapel Of Ghouls* and *Immortal Rites* have never been topped for otherworldly menace and riffs that tear your soul apart. Still untouchable after all these years.

PRESS

1 DEATH
SYMBOLIC
(1995)

There are more extreme death metal albums, musically and lyrically, but none are as visionary as Death's sixth and penultimate album, *Symbolic*.

Since his landmark debut, *Scream Bloody Gore*, eight years earlier, Chuck Schuldiner and the revolving line-up of musicians he used to bring his incredible vision to life had showed that death metal could evolve into something new. *Symbolic*'s predecessor, *Individual Thought Patterns*, was a huge stepping stone, but it was here that Death's full, magnificent potential was realised.

Powered by drummer extraordinaire Gene Hoglan, *Symbolic* was a labyrinth of technicality and cerebral lyrical meanderings, displaying unsurpassable musicianship yet all the while managing to remain incredibly accessible. From the shockingly catchy title track to the epic sonic landscapes of closer *Perennial Quest*, death metal had never sounded like this before.

A quarter of a century after its release, and nearly two decades after Chuck Schuldiner's tragically premature demise, *Symbolic* remains the pinnacle of the entire death metal genre.

Chuck Schuldiner and his crew had to be No.1, no question

PRESS.

PRESS/GUILLERMO BRICENO

TETRARCH

PEOPLE CALL US LEADERS OF THE NU METAL RESURGENCE...

I HOPE WE DON'T LET THEM DOWN

Starting life as a thrash band before getting inspired by nu metal's downtuned guitars, big personalities and mainstream appeal, Tetrarch are twisting the bones of the genre into inspiring new forms

WORDS: DANNII LEIVERS

“WE’VE ALWAYS WANTED TO BE A MAINSTREAM METAL BAND”

DIAMOND ROWE, GUITARS

“If chain wallets made a comeback, I would be all about it.” Tetrarch vocalist and guitarist Josh Fore is weighing up the benefits of the nu metal revival. His bandmate, lead guitarist and shredder extraordinaire Diamond Rowe, cuts in, equally enthusiastic. “I wear one now!” she says. “So, if anything, I’ll have a hand in that comeback.”

The jury is out on whether the world needs the return of the most ubiquitous alt accessory of the 00s. But as far as the music is concerned, it feels like we’ve been on the cusp of a nu metal renaissance for some time now.

In 2016, Cane Hill took a faltering stab at a revival with their swaggering debut album, *Smile* – albeit backing away from it by 2019’s *Kill The Sun* EP. A year later, Ocean Grove’s genre-mashing debut, *The Rhapsody Tapes*, blended nu metal with grunge, hip hop and alt-rock, and more recent albums such as Vein’s *Errorzone* (2018), Northlane’s *Alien* (2019) and *I Let It In And It Took Everything* by Loathe (2020) have all tapped into the genre’s downtuned aggression and swaggering bounce. Now, a new crop of bands, including Pennsylvania’s Tallah, London’s Darknet and Tasmania’s Alpha Wolf are moulding their angst into new shapes, but it’s Atlanta’s Tetrarch who are leading the charge. The band’s new album, *Unstable*, is a fusion of Korn-esque skin-crawling atmospherics, chugging grooves and accessible choruses, topped by lightning-fast, ripping leads. A sound that’s both fresh and nostalgic.

“We didn’t set out to be the resurgence of nu metal,” says Diamond, speaking to us along with Josh, via video call. “But if you ask us, those are some of the best bands of our genre. They were great songwriters and people don’t give them credit as musicians, but there were some great musicians in there, great vocalists, very charismatic entertainers. If people want to call us the leaders of the nu

Tetrarch (left to right): Ryan Lerner, Josh Fore, Diamond Rowe, Ruben Limas

metal resurgence, I hope we don't let them down…"

Diamond and Josh formed Tetrarch in 2007, when they were still at school – they came up with the band name, which refers to the ruler of a divided kingdom, in a history lesson. As the only two people in the seventh grade who were into metal and played instruments, their friendship quickly blossomed over a shared love for Metallica. "When we started, we were a straight-up thrash band," remembers Josh. "We just wanted to play as fast as possible and rewrite *Kill 'Em All*."

Their debut EP, 2008's *Pravda*, was an attempt to do just that, but by the late 2000s the band had evolved, drinking in the influence of nu metal and the metalcore bands who usurped their throne.

Last year, Diamond was listed as one of *Hammer*'s one-to-watch guitarists and is the first female African-American metal guitarist to get major press coverage in the US, a title she says she's slowly come to recognise the importance of. "When I was young I was like, 'I don't know what you're talking about, I just want to be like Kirk Hammett'," she laughs. "But as we've grown older, I get hundreds of messages from people saying, 'I didn't know there was anyone in the mainstream who looks like me.' Seeing me up [onstage] has helped get people into the band or the genre who might not have considered metal before."

And as Tetrarch's profile grows, she's started getting recognition from her childhood heroes, something she's struggled to get her head around. In January, having filmed a playthrough demo for ESP guitars, she was shocked to see Jim Root's name pop up in her Instagram DMs. "He messaged me and said, 'Man, you rip. It makes me wanna go practise'," she chuckles. "We had a little back and forth. It was super-cool."

From the beginning, Tetrarch knew they were going to make it. But that confidence, determination and bloody-minded focus saw them snubbed by the local Atlanta scene, who viewed them as calculated careerists.

"A lot of the local bands were like, 'Let's go and play a show with our friends and then go get drunk all night'," says Diamond. "We just weren't into that. We would film every show then go directly home and watch it back, looking at what we did bad and what we did good. A lot of bands looked at us like, 'Oh they think they're better than everybody, they're assholes', but it wasn't that. We didn't have that underground mentality. We always had the attitude that we want to be a mainstream metal band."

Eventually, that mindset started to pay off. In 2011, the band were invited to support Avenged Sevenfold, Alter Bridge and Seether at Atlanta's 12,000-capacity Ameris Bank Amphitheatre. It was their biggest show by a mile and gave them a taste for big stages, fuelling their ambition.

In 2015, determined to make success happen, Diamond, Josh and bassist Ryan Lerner packed up and headed west, to LA, where they were joined by new drummer Ruben Limas, who'd just moved to the States from Venezuela. There, they rented a house together and started work on what would

DOWNTUNED FOR LIFE

Guitarist Diamond Rowe picks her favourite nu metal axe-wielders

DAN DONEGAN (DISTURBED)

"He is the unsung hero of Disturbed. His solos are super-tasteful and his riffs are unconventional. I don't think he gets as much love as he should. One day, I was messing around learning the riff to *Stricken*. It's a learnable riff, it's not like it's tech death, but I'm like, 'Man the timing of this riff is weird!' You don't think about it, but he is really talented."

WES BORLAND (LIMP BIZKIT)

"He had a huge hand in revolutionising nu metal because of his riffs. The riff in *Nookie* is killer, you don't think about it because Fred Durst is the main guy, but it's a killer riff. That's the thing with a lot of these nu metal bands; they had such strong, star power singers, they tended to be overlooked. None of them, except for Dan Donegan, really soloed so they didn't have these moments out front."

BRAD DELSON (LINKIN PARK)

"He's not a super-upfront or technical guitar player. But in a band like Linkin Park, where you have a rapper, a singer, a turntablist… you have all these elements that you have to fit somewhere between. It added the grit, and he did a good job of finding that place within, finding the groove and the pockets between the rapping. That's not an easy job to do."

HEAD & MUNKY (KORN)

"Head is not what you would consider to be a 'technical' guitar player but I personally think it takes a certain spirit to write those unsettling guitar parts and melody lines that he has been able to create. He took a very unconventional approach to guitar at the time and turned it into memorable hooks, which is why we all can sing back the intro guitar part to *Falling Away From Me* or *Freak On A Leash*. The way he and Munky came up with really weird, creepy sounds to lay on top of each other on a verse… no one had done that before and still, no one does that."

JIM ROOT (SLIPKNOT)

"He has the most comparable style to my personal playing, in the sense he is a very versatile player. He can write really sick grooves and also fill out sections with textures that give a creepy, skin-crawling vibe. There's no end to his creativity and he doesn't allow himself to be put into a box."

PRESS/JEREMY SAFFER. JIM ROOT: PRESS

become their debut album, 2017's *Freak*. That year, they headed off on a high-profile tour with Devildriver and 36 Crazyfists. Soon, the band were being courted by several major metal labels, although none of them seemed to know quite how to market their sound, which fell between radio rock anthemia and Slipknot-indebted brutality.

"A lot of people told us it's not good to walk that line, you need to be one or the other," says Diamond. "We never listened to them. Slipknot has *People = Shit* and *Snuff* – you can't tell me there's something wrong with that! You have to know whether the advice you're being given as a young band is the best for you or not. That's the hardest part."

Instead, they decided to go it alone, writing the music they wanted to write and releasing *Freak* independently, roping in Dave Otero (Khemmis, Cattle Decapitation) to co-produce and add real weight to their modern metal anthems. Last year, the band finally signed a deal with Napalm Records – "They came to us with the type of offer and the kind of enthusiasm we wanted," says Diamond – and began work on their massive second album, *Unstable*. And believe us, when the time comes to get back in those sweaty pits, tracks like *You Never Listen* and *I'm Not Right* will own huge crowds and rooms.

"We're a band that alternative or pop or hip hop fans can listen to, but we also have heavy songs that metal fans love and can get in the pit with and kill each other to," says Diamond. "We are riff machines. If Josh and I need to come together to write a riff banger, we absolutely can. We can do it all. We're that gateway band and we love that."

"WE HAVE SONGS PEOPLE CAN KILL EACH OTHER TO"

DIAMOND ROWE, GUITARS

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LG PETROV

LG PETROV WAS THE ULTIMATE METALHEAD

Entombed's legendary frontman wasn't just a great vocalist – his lust for life made him an adored figure in our world

WORDS: DOM LAWSON

PRESS/MACIEJ PIELOCH

Legendary death metal vocalist Lars-Göran Petrov passed away on March 7, 2021, after a brutal battle with cancer. If anyone needs proof that the Swede's contribution to our world was colossal and enduring, one need only direct their attention to the avalanche of effusive and affectionate tributes that instantly poured onto the internet. Best known as frontman with Stockholm legends Entombed, LG had been a relentless and much-loved presence on the global metal touring circuit, crossing paths with bands and musicians from myriad points along the heaviness spectrum. He was, without doubt, the life and soul of many unforgettable, booze-sodden parties, and everyone from Machine Head's Robb Flynn to Opeth's Mikael Åkerfeldt have spoken fondly about the amazing times they had with him and their admiration for the music he made. You don't have to dig deep to discover that everybody loved LG.

If one thing defined LG Petrov's career in music, it was his unwavering and intense enthusiasm for heavy metal. He began his career in a handful of amateurish teenage bands, before becoming the drummer in nascent Swedish black metallers Morbid (from whom Norwegian legends Mayhem procured ill-fated vocalist Dead in 1988). Meanwhile, something unique was stirring in the Stockholm underground. Death metal was well-established as a unique genre by the end of the 80s, with its most influential bands nearly all hailing from the US. That all changed with the formation of Nihilist, featuring LG on vocals, and their contemporaries Dismember, Unleashed and Grave.

Swedish death metal was aggressive, dark and heavy like its American forebear, but the sound these bands were making was markedly different, insanely exciting and pretty fucking cool. In particular, Nihilist were a jolting dose of pure adrenaline, with a raging punk vibe, loads of irresistibly nasty hooks and a guitar sound (courtesy of the now legendary HM-2 pedal) that threatened to scythe through your walls and take your head off. Nihilist changed their name to Entombed in 1989 and released their debut album, *Left Hand Path*, the following year. Its impact was colossal and undeniable. With LG bellowing charismatically throughout, the album noisily defined the Swedish death metal sound in the ears of the world, hurling open the gates for a generation of Scandinavian bands in the process.

Entombed: legends of the Scandinavian death metal scene

Absent from Entombed's classic second album, *Clandestine*, LG Petrov contributed vocals to Stockholm crew Comecon's *Megatrends In Brutality* album in 1991, but was back and where he belonged for the Swedes' seminal and ground-breaking third album, *Wolverine Blues* (1993). Another milestone in metal's evolution, the album single-handedly invented the concept of death'n'roll, via the likes of *Hollowman* and *Out Of Hand*: songs that provided LG with the perfect backdrop for his infernal yelling and Lemmy-gone-feral rasp. Entombed were always fond of recording cover versions, too, and one in particular stands out from that era. Listen to their version of Kiss's *God Of Thunder* and hear LG in his absolute element, out demon-ing Gene Simmons with ease and – we must assume – grinning from ear to ear.

People talk a lot of bollocks about metal's frailty in the 90s. In fact, as ever, lots of exciting things were happening in the underground, and Entombed were among the most inventive bands around. Their fourth album, *To Ride, Shoot Straight And Speak The Truth* (1997), marched even further away from traditional death metal, embracing all manner of eclectic influences along the way.

A year later, they released *Same Difference*, an album that jettisoned nearly all traces of old-school metal and veered into bludgeoning noise rock and grunge-punk territory. Although many viewed the record as a misstep, it remained in keeping with Entombed's ethos and showcased LG's ability to sound at home in any number of thunderous sonic environments.

Returning to a more familiar death'n'roll attack for their first 21st-century album, *Uprising* (2000), Entombed became less creatively restless and more focused towards the end of their first chapter. As inarguable death metal legends, their shows were increasingly celebratory, too; not least due to the sheer number of cast-iron anthems the band had penned over the years. It also helped that LG Petrov was an absolutely phenomenal frontman, with a gift for ensuring that everyone in the room, theatre or field had a loud, beery and cheerfully obnoxious night to remember.

Not every musician wants to spend huge amounts of time on the road, but LG Petrov visibly enjoyed every second of the touring life. Sadly, he parted ways with Entombed in 2013, citing frustration at the band's lack of live activity as a principal motivation. With a confusing dispute over the rights to use the band's name, LG unveiled his own crew, Entombed A.D., in 2014.

Although dedicated to writing their own music from the start, the new band

PRESS.

LG Petrov: a force to be reckoned with onstage; nicest bloke ever offstage

LG continued having the time of his life with Entombed A.D.

were also custom-designed to get out on the road and play Entombed songs to the fans that had supported his band for all those years. They released their debut album, *Back To The Front*, in August 2014 and hit the road like men possessed, serving up the timeless likes of *Stranger Aeons*, *Wolverine Blues* and *Chief Rebel Angel* alongside their own new songs at festivals across Europe. As ever, LG seemed to be having the time of his life.

However, he wasn't content with just one kick-ass death metal band. Also formed in 2014, Firespawn sounded nothing like Entombed A.D., eschewing the latter's death'n'roll swagger for a pitch-black, super-technical take on the old school. The band's debut album, *Shadow Realms*, emerged in 2015: another magnificent showcase for LG's none-more-classic death metal vocals and warped, witty lyrics. In particular, *Lucifer Has Spoken* was a glorious example of LG's incendiary charms: as he roars lines such as *'The son of black dawn will rise up his throne / Deep down in the pits of darkness unknown...'* amid a swirling storm of gruesome riffing, he truly sounds like the master of ceremonies at the end of the world.

In recent years, LG was a remorseless force for heavy metal good. Entombed A.D. have continued to grow in stature and popularity: their 2019 album *Bowels Of Earth* was widely praised as the band's finest and a welcome return to old-school deathly purity. Meanwhile, Firespawn have released a further two albums and cemented their reputation as major death metal heavyweights. For LG himself, the opportunity to make music and tour the world was one that he never took for granted.

HE WAS THE LIFE AND SOUL OF MANY UNFORGETTABLE PARTIES

"We just get out there and tour and then we'll make another new album," he told this writer in 2019. "It never ends! We all enjoy it a lot. When we meet up in the cab to the airport and have a few beers, we are a happy bunch of guys!"

Much to the dismay of the entire metal world, LG's cancer diagnosis became public knowledge last summer ("It's just very, very bad luck," he told *Hammer*. "Cancer doesn't have feelings. It's just maximum bad luck."). It is always tragic when anyone is struck down with such a useless and nasty disease, but somehow it's even more so when that person is so gloriously full of life and love for his fellow man. LG was a true heavy metal diehard, one of the greatest death metal vocalists of all time and the voice of countless immortal classics, but it's obvious from every tribute to this fallen hero that his greatest gift to the world was to bring a big, shit-eating grin to the face of everyone who met him. He was a real deal, balls-to-the-wall God Of Thunder, admired by his peers and loved by all.

"We are devastated to announce that our beloved friend Lars-Göran Petrov has left us," LG's Entombed A.D. bandmates said in a statement. "Our brother, leader, vocalist, our Chief Rebel Angel went on another ride last night. It's with the deepest sadness that we have to announce that Lars-Göran Petrov has left us.

"He was (is!!!) an incredible friend, and a person that has touched so many people. He has changed so many lives with his voice, his music, his character and his unique personality. LG's smile is something that we will carry forever in our hearts. When asked in an interview what he would like to have written on his grave about his legacy, he said 'I will never die, it will never die.' And you didn't. You will live forever in our hearts."

LIVE: KEVIN NIXON. PRESS/NICLAS BRUNZELL.

RIP, LG

The great and the good of metal pay their respects to a lifer and an innovator of the genre

"When I started in Amon Amarth, LG was a huge influence on me as a singer. I still hold him to be one of the best, most original, influential singers the death metal genre has ever had. But more than this, LG became a friend. He was a humble and genuine person, always with a smile and laugh close at hand. There was nothing fake about him. I'll miss him greatly."
Johan Hegg, Amon Amarth

"LG was a larger-than-life character that lived his life to the full – anyone that knew him will testify to this. Whenever we met up, the experience was always memorable. He'd fill a room with laugher and joy: always humble, amiable, kind and sincere. He was a special human being that will always have a place in our hearts and minds. His spirit lives on in the memories that he has left us and the legacy of his music. His passing leaves us with great sadness, but we'll remember the good times. We raise a glass to the memory of the great Lars-Göran Petrov."
Karl Willetts, Memoriam

"LG was 'our guy'. A Stockholm original. I should rephrase and say he 'is' our guy, really. That will never change, even if he's physically not here anymore. He epitomised the term 'down to earth'. No frills. He was just a downright lovely person. Brimming with positivity. A friend. Someone we knew, and he knew us. Every time I ran into him we always talked and laughed about something. He'd bum a cigarette (back when I was a smoker) and we'd have a beer, chatting away.

"Musically, he was a giant in the world of singers. I like to think I've told him, but he'd have laughed it off. My favourite performance of his was when Entombed played at the Royal Opera in Stockholm. It was amazing! LG at the piano! They put a lot of attending musicians to shame that evening, and I was one of them.

"We have to let this sink in. It's not as easy as having an 'Entombed evening' on the stereo and expecting to feel better. Soon though, I hope. We extend our sincere condolences and respect to his family and friends, as well as to all members of Morbid, Nihilist and Entombed, past or present. Many of which are friends of ours. Damn it! It's even difficult to stop writing as that kind of seals everything. But there you go. Lars-Göran Petrov, rest in peace."
Mikael Åkerfeldt, Opeth (via Facebook)

"Very sad to hear the news about LG. He was one of the best guys. I met LG in 1994 when Machine Head played Stockholm for the first time. He came into the dressing room like an explosion, he was funny and a very nice guy. Two years later we took them on tour. Man, I was SO into *Left Hand Path* when it came out, and the *Wolverine Blues* track *Hollowman* is a straight classic. It was an honour to take them out. He was always great to be around, very funny and very humble. We drank enormous amounts of vodka

PRESS/MACIEJ PIELOCH

on that tour together, and one of my absolute favourite memories was on the last night of the tour, their entire band and crew came out stark bollocks naked with the words 'Machine Head' painted across their chest. Hilarious!

"The first time that I ever downloaded anything from a torrent site, LG helped me do it. The last time we hung out was when they supported Amon Amarth at the Warfield in San Francisco. We got quite drunk and had more than a few laughs. He always had the best smile. Rest in power, friend."
Robb Flynn, Machine Head (via Instagram)

LG and his longtime pal Michael Amott

"Rest in Power LG! We had a lot of great times together, especially in the late 80s underground scene when we didn't have record deals – simpler times. The first time I stayed with you in your mum's apartment I couldn't believe you had a huge drum kit in your bedroom, and banged out King Diamond songs in the middle of the night! You were a great drummer. We had a wicked time in London when I played in Entombed for a hot minute! We had even more fun in the 90s touring together with Entombed and Carcass – luckily there were no smartphones to capture all the nonsense we got up to! I also remember the summer of 2000, we shared a tourbus in Europe and opened for Iron Maiden. Fuck yeah, metal dreams do come true! It was always cool to catch up at festivals, and reconnecting online and sharing pics and memories was fun and emotional. You fought hard, my friend. You did your best. Thanks for the good memories, the laughs, the music! Cheers buddy, wish you a safe onward journey. See ya on the left hand path."
Michael Amott, Arch Enemy

"Out of all the people from the original Stockholm death metal scene, LG was always the one you were most likely to run into at a local show or a private party. A beer in one hand, a smoke in the other, always in a good mood and always ready to discuss Sadus, Destruction, Venom, touring, our shared management, collaborations or future plans. The last thing we agreed on was that we'd meet in a tourbus as soon as this shit was over. Only two weeks later you went ahead into the great beyond, which I'm sure beats any old tour. Thank you for all the great moments we got to share, all characterised by your total lack of pretence, your love for the metal outsider lifestyle and your mischievous smile. All of which will be greatly missed by all of us in Watain."
Erik Danielsson, Watain

"Lars was one of the most important frontmen in death metal. Swedish DM at the start was split into two factions – the Stockholm Sound and the Gothenburg sound. With the latter focusing on melodic sensibilities – see Dark Tranquillity, At The Gates and In Flames – the former was the point of origin for the 'sludge' death metal sound, a sound that Unleashed, Carnage and Dismember were famous for, but that Entombed made a household name. Without Entombed and Lars's distinct vocal, who knows where the genre may have headed?"
Jamie Graham, Viscera

"LG Petrov was a true pioneer of extreme, underground music and his contribution to the legacy of death metal, and heavy metal in general, should never be understated. As a frontman and vocalist he was a hero of mine, as a human being he was one of the best. I was fortunate to be able to call LG a friend and we shared stages and beers together many times at festivals. He was always happy, always laughing and joking and you were always guaranteed a good time in his company. LG will be sorely missed by everyone that knew him, especially his family, friends and bandmates but also by the millions of fans worldwide whose lives he touched with his music. Ride on LG, shoot straight and follow the left hand path!"
Ben Ward, Orange Goblin

"I met LG when Cadaver shared a stage with Entombed at an obscure show in a Swedish village in October 1990, a few months after *Left Hand Path* was released. I knew his work as 'Drutten', the drummer in Morbid, a super-influential Swedish black metal band featuring Dead, and LG and Uffe from Entombed on drums and guitar. Back then, the Norwegian and Swedish scene was one and we all shared the same taste in underground death and black metal, as it was being forged by us all. I paid attention as Morbid became Nihilist and then Entombed. They were one of the best bands from Sweden ever, and their impact on metal is much bigger than most younger fans realise. The whole branch of American metal bands like Slipknot have taken so much from Entombed it's ridiculous they do not get more fame. They invented a sound and stand out to me as the most important Swedish band, like Mayhem is the most important band from Norway.

"LG was always a big smile and the most humble of all the people in that band. We kept in touch over the years and met every summer somewhere on a festival, or five. The very last time I saw him he was hanging out with us – Satyricon – and Phil Anselmo & The Illegals at a Swedish festival in July 2019. We updated our phone numbers and when I heard he got cancer we started to talk and text more, as I'd gone through cancer and survived myself. We texted 'til the very end and I am devastated that he didn't make it. It makes me even more humble and glad that I survived.

"I participated on an Entombed cover tribute track on Slay At Home fest this autumn and sent the link to LG. He was so happy seeing this and it felt like giving him something to be proud of. We all loved him. I saw Necrobutcher from Mayhem last night and he told me an Entombed gig he saw in the 90s was the best live show he had ever seen. They killed it every time. What an insane band."
Anders Odden, Cadaver/Satyricon

As a cancer survivor, Anders Odden (centre) was there for his friend LG

"LG set the standard for death metal vocals in Sweden and Europe in the late 80s. Metalhead lifer 'til death, he never stopped. Great guy, always happy. Super-cool dude. The first time I met him was at Maryland Deathfest. Then I'd see him at festivals or in Sweden when he went to our shows. In Sweden, he was backstage with us and said it was fantastic and amazing. He was so happy :(RIP, legend."
Jeff Becerra, Possessed

"In 1994, Amorphis supported Entombed and we built great friendships. They'd just released *Wolverine Blues* and it was the best ever. Still is. Over the years we met quite often, when LG had been in town or at festivals or him popping up from somewhere when Amorphis played in Stockholm. He was always in a good mood and it was always great fun to catch up. He was one of the most big-hearted, down-to-earth, funny and social dudes that I've ever met. A hardworking guy whose influential vocal sound is the best in the whole death metal scene. I don't know if Amorphis would even exist without Nihilist and Entombed. There is not going to be another LG Petrov. Thank you for the music dear friend, and being just absolutely awesome!"
Esa Holopainen, Amorphis/Silver Lake

HEADSHOTS: PRESS. WITH THANKS TO MICHAEL AMOTT AND ANDERS ODDEN

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While She Sleeps: less severity, more sincerity

WHILE SHE SLEEPS

Sleeps Society

SLEEPS BROTHERS / SPINEFARM

Steel City metalcore champions embrace their evolution

THREE YEARS AGO, While She Sleeps had just come off their most successful cycle yet. 2017's *You Are We* saw them nail their distinctive brand of metalcore – a perfect blend of melodic hooks, turbocharged riffs, and huge gang-chant choruses – and finally, it seemed as though those long-touted 'future of metal' predictions were falling into place. So the band's decision to follow it by changing up their sound on 2019's genre-mashing *So What?* was a risky one, introducing rapping, choirs, electronics and more melody, and garnering mixed reactions from some fans who thought they knew what this band were about.

Sleeps Society, which is named after the band's Patreon platform, sees them continuing to chip away at those preconceived expectations. It still sounds like WSS, of course; guitarist Sean Long has a seemingly bottomless pit of inventive, twisting riffs at his disposal, which makes sure of that, but what's most startling is just how natural the more experimental touches now sound embedded in the band's classic formula.

"SLEEPS SOCIETY IS AN ALBUM FOR THESE TROUBLED TIMES"

Opener *Enlightenment(?)*, a song that warns against the constant pursuit of perfection (*'You are the authority of your own existence'*), starts with a spiralling riff that gives way to a nagging electronic hook in the song's final act. A filthy, acid rave undercurrent pervades throughout the buzzing title track, and *Systematic*, a nu metal rager that's weightier than gods' balls, hits like an aftershock, complete with rapping, turntable scratching and cheerleader chants. These are no longer jarring embellishments; now they simply feel like part of WSS's genetic makeup, to the extent that the more straightforward moments like *Call Of The Void* and *No Defeat*

For The Brave, which throw back to the *Brainwashed* era, feel like the least interesting material here.

This all makes *Sleeps Society* a natural progression from *So What?*, but when they come, the curveballs feel even bolder. It's difficult to imagine the band would have sat down two years ago and written a song like the anthemic, almost completely clean *Nervous*, which features some earnest ad libs from metalcore's guest star de jour, Biffy Clyro's Simon Neil, fresh from his turn on Architects' *For Those That Wish To Exist*. The same goes for *Division Street*, which sacks off the clarion-call riffs altogether for nothing but the band's voices, rising in anxious unison over a trembling piano.

The biggest surprise, however, comes with seven-minute closer *DN3 3HT*. Over a crackled line and a stark piano, each bandmember offers a message to their fanbase with words of appreciation and encouragement for those struggling through hard times. It's a pretty cheesy idea and in less genuine hands it could have been woeful, but While She Sleeps manage to turn it into a sincere and heartfelt moment. Throughout this album, there's a message of self-love: of knowing your worth at a moment when mental health is on its arse and people are full of doubt and fear for the future. All of which makes *Sleeps Society* an album very much for these troubled times, from a band we can continue to believe in.

FOR FANS OF: **Architects, Bury Tomorrow, Beartooth**

DANNII LEIVERS

'68
Give One Take One
COOKING VINYL

Ex-Chariot/Norma Jean frontman hits the American dustroads

Josh Scogin is a hero to many for his tenure in both The Chariot and Norma Jean, but he's done some excellent work since, with both prior '68 albums sounding like an audacious mix of Robert Johnson Delta blues and the chaotic squalor of early Nirvana. The best duos thrive on chemistry and Josh's howled wail and overdriven guitar melds beautifully with Nikko Yamada's busy, powerhouse drumming. *The Knife, The Knife, The Knife* and *The Storm, The Storm, The Storm* writhe with seething tension, as if the duo are sizing one another up before an epic Western gunfight, while *Nickels And Diamonds* borrows from The Stooges' *I Wanna Be Your Dog* to scintillating effect.

FOR FANS OF: **Death From Above 1979, The Black Keys, The Chariot**

REMFRY DEDMAN

THE ARMED
Ultrapop
SARGENT HOUSE

Hardcore mutants whip up a surreal sonic maelstrom

The Armed might be one of the most unique and fascinating bands on the planet right now. The contributors are unknown for the most part, although we do get grunge legend Mark Lanegan lending his vocal prowess to closing track *The Music Becomes A Skull*, but their mix of mathy, maddening punk, formless passages of noise and art-pop sensibilities is evidence enough that these are some truly deranged individuals. *A Life So Wonderful* and *Faith In Medication* don't seem to know if they want to be Aphex Twin, Sparks, Captain Beefheart or Mayhem, so they just go ahead and be all of them at once. If you're prepared to put in the work *Ultrapop* is a magnificent collision of noise. If you aren't, run like hell.

FOR FANS OF: **The Chariot, The Locust, Mr. Bungle**

STEPHEN HILL

AS EVERYTHING UNFOLDS
Within Each Lies The Other
LONG BRANCH

Anthemic introspection from UK post-hardcore newbies

As Everything Unfolds' debut album brims with self-assured ambition. It's post-hardcore meets modern metalcore as the sextet draw from their collective emotions, from joy to vengeance. With huge riffs and even bigger hooks, *On The Inside* and *Hiding From Myself* surge with the type of chest-beating anthemia designed to evoke massive singalongs, while *Stranger In The Mirror* harnesses searing cleans and infectious lead breaks designed to get the hordes bouncing. Elsewhere, introspective cuts *Grayscale* and closer *Wither* move seamlessly between ambient swells and fevered screams. *Within Each Lies The Other* is an honest blend of youthful energy and maturity that's made to grab your attention.

FOR FANS OF: **Dream State, Sleeping With Sirens, Annisokay**

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

Årabrot haven't lost their sense of danger yet

ÅRABROT
Norwegian Gothic
PELAGIC

Norway's noise rock surrealists continue to refine their art

THOSE FOLLOWING THE 20-year career of Norway's favourite noise rock refuse scavengers – their moniker is taken from the name of a garbage dump in Haugesund – have likely noticed that as Årabrot's career has progressed, they've been slowly leaning towards the 'rock' side of the equation. Ten albums in and that slow lean continues as *Norwegian Gothic* shaves away more of the abrasion in its exploration of isolation, triumph, and every rocker's topics: sex and death.

The album's four-track opening block barrels out like a well-oiled machine of fine-tuned proggy punk and discordant grunge that gussies up the edges with 90s alt-rock (*Carnival Of Love*), dancefloor disco vs latter-day Mastodon (*The Rule Of Silence*), ventricle-pumping rhythms, loping guitars, understated keys and Unsane's slow knife twist (*Feel It On*) and Fugazi taking a bright-eyed run at Steve Albini's catalogue (*The Lie*).

Despite emerging with a quartet of awesome songs cut from an awesome cloth, Årabrot refuse to sit still, incorporating dynamics and diversions that prevent a good thing from being driven into the ground. *Hallucinational* does what the title promises, calling on David Lynch and Angelo Badalamenti for a rendezvous in downtown Twin Peaks with steel guitars and reverb pedals at the ready. A distorted bass, Kjetil Nernes' tortured howl and a riff crossing The Ramones and Swans directs (*This Is*) *The Night* into shadowy corners. *Hard Love* imagines Lightning Bolt's frenetic pace slowed by two thirds and presented via baritone guitar, caveman drum patterns and Karin Park doing her best Chrissy 'Divinyls' Amphlett. *Hounds Of Heaven* is a low-end, organ-speckled beast ripe for any Church Of Satan service and, as a whole, *Norwegian Gothic* is Årabrot rocking at their most conventional while managing to stir fresh colours into the genre's 70-plus-year-old palette.

FOR FANS OF: Big Black, The Birthday Party, Swans

CONNIE GORDON

AUTARKH
Form In Motion
SEASON OF MIST

Dutch avant-black metallers arise out of tragedy

Rising from the ashes of Dodecahedron after the tragic passing of frontman Michiel Eikenaar from cancer comes a project that's slightly easier on the ear but no less bewildering. Viciously unorthodox BM and virulent angularity remain, but they're now part of a melting pot that extends into industrial, electronica and soundtrack composition. It often seems as though parallel universes have collided to allow separate Justin Broadricks to coexist and form a black metal band informed by Godflesh, Napalm Death and Techno Animal. The talent and the scope are bamboozling, but its incessantly glitchy, difficult nature doesn't always make for a coherent or even enjoyable listen. Be careful out there, people.

FOR FANS OF: Strapping Young Lad, Blood From The Soul, Thantifaxath

ALEX DELLER

BLAZE BAYLEY
War Within Me
BLAZE BAYLEY RECORDINGS

Ex-Wolfsbane/Maiden frontman hits new heights of power

Ever since 2000's *Silicon Messiah*, Blaze Bayley has released enjoyable albums under various guises. *War Within Me* not only continues the process but is his best to date. The 10 songs are thunderous yet melodic, with Blaze in prime vocal form. There are hints of Iron Maiden and the precision of classic Megadeth draped across a power metal framework. The best moments come on the feisty title track, the speeding *Witches Night*, the punching *The Dream Of Alan Turing* and the elegant closer, *Every Storm Ends* – a hymn of hope in these uncertain times. These all benefit from Christopher Appleton's colourful, sharp guitar contributions. Blaze Bayley is still a metal force to be reckoned with.

FOR FANS OF: Helloween, Iron Maiden, Megadeth

MALCOLM DOME

BEWITCHER
Cursed Be Thy Kingdom
CENTURY MEDIA

Oregon's speed/black maniacs tap into an old-school motherlode

Bewitcher are reminiscent of NWOBHM lost souls Demon, in that they can temper the triumphant metallic gestures of that golden era with bluesy doom-rock for extra dynamism. But the fact that this trio do so with shitloads of speed metal and first-wave black metal's spiteful aggression really marks them out as ones to watch. Like Hellripper or Midnight, Bewitcher get that musical and vocal hooks and high-energy performances are paramount to success in this style. There's also a brazen attitude here that was missing from the Oregon act's pre-Century Media releases, as though they know they've hit full stride and their 'Diamond Head being devoured by prime Venom' sound is glowing red-hot like Hades.

FOR FANS OF: Midnight, Hellripper, Enforcer

DEAN BROWN

18+

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BLUE OX
Holy Vore
SELF-RELEASED

Minneapolis pit-starters bring a sense of fun to their ferocity

What pushes Blue Ox beyond similar bands worshipping at the altar of d-beat giddy-upping, bowel-rumbling low-end and the Venn Diagram Of Riffs comprised of *Clandestine*, *Satisfaction Is The Death Of Desire* and *Jane Doe* is the energetic fun looming in the background. The Minneapolis quintet's third album may administer the musical equivalent of kerb-kickings and solid-object beatings, but it simultaneously feels like a boisterous night down the pub; it would be no surprise if slamming opener *It Doesn't Work* and the fuzz-drenched circularity of *Imploding Lazarus* included raging keggers and live laugh tracks buried deep in the mix. Furthermore, the bearish vocals, screaming guitars and staccato riffing of *Fly By Blight* showcases Blue Ox's ability to give sonic violence a sense of levity, providing a unique dimension that's rare in these dark and serious days.

FOR FANS OF: Converge, Nails, Pig Destroyer

CONNIE GORDON

TERHI YLIMÄINEN/PRESS

BREATHS
Lined In Silver
SELF-RELEASED

Emotionally charged atmospherics from a masterful solo debutant

That this album is the creation of just one man is impressive in itself. *Lined In Silver* is Jason Roberts' first release as a solo artist and the quality and depth is striking. It is a well-constructed, atmospheric concept album with thoughtful lyrics and dark, poignant music that treks across landscapes of doom, post-metal, shoegaze and beyond, and whose track lengths span from five to 12 and a half minutes. He transitions from clean to harsh screams powerfully in *The Forgotten Ones* and toys smartly with the deliberate and the unhinged throughout *A Year On Fire*, but little beats *Like Wires*' magical combination of the brutal and euphoric, and echoes of souring verses and haunting effects. There are glimpses of Tool and Isis here, and yet the end result is captivatingly cohesive.

FOR FANS OF: Deftones, The Ocean, Sleep Token

NIK YOUNG

CAMBION
Conflagrate The Celestial Refugium
LAVADOME

Diehard death worship from the Lone Star State

Death metal has mutated into so many different forms over the decades that it's easy to forget how disgustingly effective the original blueprints were. Cambion proudly salute the days of all-out war and Satanic bombast, when bands like Angelcorpse cranked up the genre's speed to absurd new levels, often wearing spiked armour. This, as they say, is the real fucking thing. Uncompromising from beginning to end, *Conflagrate The Celestial Refugium* is all about bloody, jagged riffs, spine-snapping hyperblasts and a menacing, infernal atmosphere. From the heads-down violence of the opening title track to the more opaque battery of *Eiton Euclarion*, the Texans' debut is old school in spirit but precise, dynamic and sonically devastating too. Only closer *Obscuratio* allows the pace to drop, but its slithering, nightmarish nine minutes are arguably the heaviest and most terrifying thing here.

FOR FANS OF: Hate Eternal, Abysmal Dawn, Angelcorpse

DOM LAWSON

CELESTIAL SANCTUARY
Soul Diminished
CHURCH ROAD

Cambridge death metallers put old-school principles above power

The full-length debut from Cambridge quartet Celestial Sanctuary is a curious proposition. There are some terrific riffs on offer here – the standout track *Wretched Habits* alone is stuffed with 'em – but the band's strict adherence to a musical template perfected around 1990 – and their apparent refusal to acknowledge any developments since – can be disorientating. There's nothing wrong with looking back to move forward – plenty of current Swedish death metal is a rehash of Nihilist et al while remaining thrilling nonetheless – but here it feels like the band are forfeiting energy for faithfulness to old-school principles. Then again, perhaps this could be fixed with a more dynamic production; the impact of *Soul Diminished* is, well, diminished by a flabby snare sound that does it no favours. Promising, then, but not quite there.

FOR FANS OF: Bolt Thrower, Cancer, Death

JOSEPH STANNARD

Bodom After Midnight: lit by true star power

BODOM AFTER MIDNIGHT
Paint The Sky With Blood
NAPALM

One last metal assault from a legendary fallen hero

AS IF THE LAST year hadn't been vile enough, the untimely passing of Alexi Laiho hammered home the bitter truth that even the greatest talents can be cruelly stopped in their tracks. In truth, nobody wanted to be reviewing Bodom After Midnight's first, and now presumably only release, with a backdrop of grief and sadness. The irony is that this was a self-evident new lease of creative life for Alexi after the abrupt cessation of Children Of Bodom in 2019, and judging by the limited amount of evidence on display here, the Finn was on the finest of form right up until the end.

Superficially, Bodom After Midnight was a simple continuation of the groundbreaking blend of extreme metal and melodic histrionics that made Alexi one of modern metal's most enduring icons. And yes, the two new songs unveiled here are instantly recognisable as the great man's work, from the guitar work's effortless virtuosity to the incisive gleam of every melodic hook. The subtle but unmistakable difference between *Paint The Sky With Blood* and *Payback's A Bitch* and the (equally excellent) tunes on Children Of Bodom's final album, *Hexed*, is that these songs sound nastier, grittier and closer in spirit to the feral grandeur of early albums like *Hatebreeder* and *Follow The Leader*, albeit with a production that adds clattering, W.A.S.P.-like drum sounds and considerably more grandiloquent sonic swell than any previous efforts. While maybe not quite as instantly anthemic as *Hate Me!*, *Needled 24/7* and the rest, both songs crackle with an energy and intensity that makes their creator's absence all the harder to process. A faithful but fiery cover of Dissection's *Where Dead Angels Lie* completes the EP, wherein Alexi sounds genuinely possessed and having the time of his life. Which, of course, is how we shall remember him.

FOR FANS OF: Children Of Bodom, Arch Enemy, Dimmu Borgir

DOM LAWSON

Bongzilla: reformed in only one sense of the word

BONGZILLA
Weedsconsin
HEAVY PSYCH SOUNDS

Madison's most stoned fire up the cosmic bong once more

ACCORDING TO RECENT research, marijuana is still illegal in the UK. Quite how we're supposed to fully appreciate the new Bongzilla album without first consuming industrial quantities of the stuff remains to be seen. Maybe fans of sludge and doom metal in California, Uruguay, or the Netherlands or could report back with accurate reports of the mind-melting effects of this band's unmistakable riffs. It all seems terribly unfair.

Sixteen years have passed since the last Bongzilla album. Presumably, they were distracted by a pizza or simply forgot that they were in a band. These things happen. But either way, *Weedsconsin* confirms that absolutely nothing has changed in the band's world. And thank fuck for that. Plenty of bands have harnessed a similar formula over the years, but this irresistibly loose-limbed and red-eyed take on lumbering Sabbathian sludge hits considerably harder when we know that the men responsible are majestically and ecstatically stoned themselves.

The laconic shuffle of opener *Sundae Driver* makes for a typically insouciant entry point, as if someone hit the 'Record' button by accident, midway through a strident hot-boxing of Bongzilla's rehearsal room. In contrast, the anthemic *Free The Weed* feels focused, perhaps even strident by previous standards. Slumping halfway between Sleep's all-out psych-doom and the pastoral trip-rock of Dead Meadow, it's a glorious slab of gonzoid spliff-worship and a worthy anthem for any pro-pot-legalisation campaign.

The real psychedelic payload arrives with the crusty doom labyrinths of *Space Rock*, the three-part *Earth Bong/Smoked/Mags Bags* and the circular groove of closer *Gummies*. Despite a gritty, stripped down sound, these convoluted paeans to recreational foliage are thick with atmosphere and blearily hypnotic. At times, listeners may simply feel *compelled* to break the law and join Bongzilla's stoner cult. Fuck it, this rules. Let's get high.

FOR FANS OF: Bongripper, Weedeater, Eyehategod

DOM LAWSON

CONAN
Live At Freak Valley
NAPALM

A full festival set from Liverpool's heaviest to cure what ails you

Cynics may wonder why we need a third Conan live album, but right now, we'll take whatever we can get. Besides, captured on the main stage of a German open air festival, this offers a different vibe to the more intimate settings of their Roadburn and Bannermans Bar recordings, with the energy levels noticeably higher from the off. Session drummer Dan Mullins (Blasphemer) brings a vitriolic intensity to songs like *Revengeance*, making this one of Conan's most aggressive recordings to date. It's a shame there's nothing off latest album *Existential Void Guardian*, but this is still a worthwhile slab of heaviness and timely reminder of how damn good gigs were.

FOR FANS OF: Bongripper, Yob, Slomatics

KEZ WHELAN

COSMIC REAPER
Cosmic Reaper
HEAVY PSYCH SOUNDS

North Carolina doom crew fail to find a path out of their haze

Cosmic Reaper kneel before Electric Wizard's sativa-stained *Dopethrone*. While their low-slung grooves, sculptured narco-doom guitar tones and clean, detached vocals buried deep in the mix tick all the usual boxes, there's not much in the way of distinguishing stylistic characteristics. The band work best when in Witchcraft's psych-realm (*Stellar Death*) or in a Kyuss-ian haze (*Wasteland I*), but most of the loping riffs on this debut sound pretty lifeless for anyone devoted to this style of time-tested amplifier abuse. Plus, Thad Collis's vocals turn from aloof to dull to pretty grating on repeat listens because of the monotony of his timbre and phrasing.

FOR FANS OF: Windhand, Electric Wizard, Witchcraft

DEAN BROWN

CRUELTY
There Is No God Where I Am
CHURCH ROAD

UK hardcore quintet resurrect the spirit of Hydra Head-era metalcore

The frenetic energy of both of Cruelty's EPs marked them out as one of UK hardcore's most exciting new prospects, and this dynamic debut LP is another huge step up. Recalling the chaotic assault of early 00s metalcore heroes like Botch with a healthy portion of both Slayer-esque thrashing and unexpectedly poignant melodicism, the album has a much wider scope than the EPs, from wild, technical tracks like *Live*, more mosh-friendly songs like *Dead Culture* and even desolate, atmospheric and crestfallen pieces like the post-metal-inspired *Cut*. Despite the unpredictable, hectic song structures, however, the album never feels disjointed or incoherent; there's a fluid and remarkably assured quality to its sequencing, making the title track's huge, emotive climax feel even more powerful.

FOR FANS OF: Botch, The Dillinger Escape Plan, Employed To Serve

KEZ WHELAN

CRYPTOSIS
Bionic Swarm
CENTURY MEDIA

Former old-school thrashers get a futuristic upgrade

They say that a change is as good as a rest, and for the band formerly known as Distillator that old proverb feels apt. Dispensing with their old-school thrash sound in favour of a more experimental approach – which they've dubbed "futuristic multi-metal eruption" – Cryptosis's debut album sees the Dutch trio finally find their feet and ready to kick some ass. Exploring a future where runaway technology controls humanity in a variety of sinister ways, this concept album draws on progressive, symphonic, death, thrash and black metal influences to create a record that's a pigeonhole-defying thrillride from start to finish. *Death Technology* really impresses with its fusion of Sadus-esque rapier riffs and latter-day Pantera grooves, as does *Prospect Of Immortality*, a raging Frankenstein's Monster of styles that'll earn them lots of new fans.

FOR FANS OF: Sadus, Vektor, Fear Factory

EDWIN MCFEE

DEMISER
Through The Gate Eternal
BORIS

US black/thrash debutants break out from the pack

"Turning the Bible Belt into the Bullet Belt", this South Carolina quintet's debut LP manages to transcend the weight of their influences to serve up 34 effortlessly entertaining minutes of black thrashing metal to make the dead headbang. It even makes a virtue of a surgically scrubbed sound that initially seems all wrong. Songs like magisterial closer *Warfuck Demon Lust*, which had an appropriately grimy, cryptic basement aura on 2018's *Surrender To Sin* demo tape, may at first sound offputtingly clinical. Then you notice that for all the debt that Demiser still owe to rough and raw 80s records by Sodom, Venom, Destruction and The Exploited, *...Eternal* is stacked with glittering earworms and gleefully shot through with the guitar-hero exuberance of beautifully named axeman Gravepisser, glazing their raucous 80s thrash/punk roots with late 90s Gothenburg pop savvy.

FOR FANS OF: Witchery, Children Of Bodom, Slayer

CHRIS CHANTLER

EGO KILL TALENT
The Dance Between Extremes
BMG

Brazilian rockers earn the Dave Grohl seal of approval

It's easy to understand why Dave Grohl loves these Brazilians. There are times when they tap into the Foo Fighters' approach, as on the alt-pop/rock of *Beautiful* or the grungy *Deliverance*, but they also possess an intricacy and heaviness that sits comfortably alongside Stone Sour. Recorded at Grohl's 606 Studio, *The Dance Between Extremes* demands to be played over and over. It gets under your skin. Some tracks have already been released on EPs *The Dance* and *The Dance Between*, but they work better in this fuller context. There are many highlights, the album reaching a peak on *Starving Drones (A Dinner Talk)*, where the band's multiple attributes assuredly coalesce. A magnificent second album from a breathtaking band.

FOR FANS OF: Foo Fighters, Royal Blood, Stone Sour

MALCOLM DOME

FUATH
II
SEASON OF MIST

Saor mainman digs deep into black metal's roots

This orthodox black metal band of Saor's Andy Marshall are legit, so steeped in the history of 90s BM that they sound like an unearthed relic from that time rather than a modern pastiche. While Saor are more atmospheric in a contemporary fashion, Fuath – 'hatred' in Gaelic – double down on cyclic, tremolo-riff melodies and pounding ceremonial drums to elicit the state of immersion that defined the Scandinavian classics. Austere yet suitably enveloping, opener *Prophecies* is a striking example of Marshall's overall approach for the album. The quality doesn't drop on the remaining four tracks, with the imperial Emperor-esque bombast of *The Pyre* a resounding highlight. This seasoned composer keenly understands sharp album flow, structural dynamics, how to create cinematic depth, and most importantly, how to distinguish riff transitions in grand ways while still retaining a potently dense atmosphere.

FOR FANS OF: Drudkh, Saor, Satyricon

DEAN BROWN

SMALL MERCIES

Where EP is short for 'Epic Potential'

AUGUST BURNS RED
Guardians Sessions EP
FEARLESS

This EP finds the Pennsylvanian metalcore veterans in a melodic reverie. Stripping away the heavy armour, it's the brooding versions of tracks from last year's *Guardians* album that make this worth checking out.

DANNII LEIVERS

BORSTAL
At Her Majesty's Pleasure
4 FAMILY

What's harder than British underground alumni getting together, calling themselves Borstal and delivering hardcore songs about being hard? Tracks like *King Of The Jungle* are going to open you up like a lemon, my son.

ADAM REES

DISTANT
Dusk Of Anguish
UNIQUE LEADER

Distant's sledgehammer, futurist deathcore is about as heavy as it gets. *Dusk Of Anguish* repeats all the tricks of last year's *Dawn Of Corruption*, with a few gnarly rave synths chucked in on the gruesome *Cryogenesis*.

DOM LAWSON

PRIMAL FEAR
I Will Be Gone
NUCLEAR BLAST

This generous EP nominally showcases a *Led Zep III*-cribbing duet with Tarja that's ripe as Stilton. Happily, the German power metal veterans add four estimable new headbangers, including one whose chorus is, catchily, *'Bugger off.'*

CHRIS CHANTLER

SHRINES
Ghost Notes
APOCALYPTIC WITCHCRAFT

Sam Loynes can't quite suppress his roots in Akercocke and Voices. His jangly, post-punk guitars and hammy vocals might fool you, but *Relics*' kick drum doesn't lie. Like Grave Pleasures crying in Neseblod Records' basement.

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

TROLLFEST
Happy Heroes EP
NAPALM

In a bid to cheer the world up, madcap folk mob Trollfest have recorded an EP of happy-themed covers. Inevitably, their serotonin-soaked reimaginings descend into chaos, but it's worth it for Aqua's *Cartoon Heroes*.

HOLLY WRIGHT

Cannibal Corpse: just don't call them Rutan's clan

CANNIBAL CORPSE

Violence Unimagined

METAL BLADE

Florida's death metal indignitaries gouge out a new classic

YOU ALREADY WROTE *Fucked With A Knife*. What violence is there left to imagine, lads? Album number 15 doesn't detail any new, exciting ways to remove someone's scrotum using just a fidget spinner and elbow grease. Instead, Florida's death metal daddies have weaned one of their most wretched, brutal babies this side of the millennium.

At a glance, Cannibal Corpse aren't doing much different here. *Violence Unimagined* spews forth 11 songs of stupidly guttural, low-end extremity. George Fisher's iconic barks tie everything down for the rhythm section that refuses to die, Alex Webster and Paul Mazurkiewicz flitting from militaristically precise blasts to mid-tempo stalking on *Inhumane Harvest*. It's exhilarating stuff; *Murderous Rampage*'s intro fill is vintage Paul, and he doesn't loosen his grip on the sticks until that final percussive push.

But wake up and smell the body. This isn't any old Cannibal album. This is the catchiest they've sounded in ages. *Surround, Kill, Devour* packs a genuinely singalong chorus, whereas *Bound And Burned*'s initial riff is Southern-fried with a lingering Lamb Of God aftertaste. Nothing here is skippable, each track detailing a little more of the macabre menagerie until it climaxes with *Cerements Of The Flayed*, all splashing cymbals and spasmodic soloing.

Speaking of solos, the band's long-serving producer, Erik Rutan, is now widdling alongside Rob Barrett full-time. He slips into the pocket immediately. *Follow The Blood* harbours one of the more melodious, guitar-hero moments in Cannibal Corpse's entire catalogue. On the comically heavy *Overtorture*, which he penned by himself, Erik's frantic riffing keeps this 30-plus-year-old band on their toes – and they're loving it.

The old-school death metal revival has gained steam recently, but most of those newbies sound like piss down the pan compared to this. Potent and perilously addictive, *Violence Unimagined* is, without question, 2021's bloody benchmark for the genre.

FOR FANS OF: Nile, Hate Eternal, Deicide

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

FUOCO FATUO

Obsidian Katabasis

PROFOUND LORE

Cosmic doom crew pitch your guts into a wormhole

These Italian funeral psych-doom bruisers mastered crushing heaviosity with their earliest material, and although it is gradually being refined into more distinctive and versatile forms, the Thor's-Hammering weight of this gargantuan third album will still wrench your guts. The sound is extraordinary. You're never quite sure what's what; crackling waves of amp noise judder and undulate hypnotically, until suddenly the guitars coalesce into a razor-sharp cosmic doom riff. At one point you're not sure if they're playing a sample of a crashing sea in a thunderstorm, or if that's just what the band have managed to get their instruments to sound like. It's more rounded than 2017's excellent *Backwater*, atmospherically and dynamically varied, and quieter moments maintain a haunting intensity.

FOR FANS OF: Darkspace, Disembowelment, Esoteric

CHRIS CHANTLER

GENGHIS TRON

Dream Weapon

RELAPSE

NY's experimental noise crew return on a higher, hazy plane

Understand one thing: this is, and is not, Genghis Tron. At some point the band lost themselves to an almighty comedown, leaving behind the brilliant digi-grind of *Board Up The House* and a mess of dirty glitter swirling in the last brown suds of a truly bacchanalian foam party. Now, founder members Hamilton Jordan and Michael Sochynsky have reunited sans vocalist Mookie Singerman – replaced by The Armed's Tony Wolski – and with an actual human drummer – Sumac's Nick Yacyshyn. The results are *different* but also a bizarre and masterful fulfilment of promise, wherein the savagery has been scaled back and replaced with woozy shoegaze drifts, 90s post-hardcore melodies and neon-lit *Drive* soundtrack synths. Genghis Tron are dead, long live Genghis Tron!

FOR FANS OF: Hum, Pinkish Black, Deftones

ALEX DELLER

GREENLEAF

Echoes From A Mass

NAPALM

Scandic bluesy stoner rockers layer on the jam

While Greenleaf might have long rivalled Spinal Tap when it comes to line-ups, they can still craft speaker-shaking, diabolically good riffs. Initially starting out life as a Dozer side-project, Greenleaf have been on a roll since singer Arvid Hällagård joined in 2014 and this eighth LP is their most exciting effort to date. Bluesy and bullish, it's one huge jam session and very tasty it is too. Highlights include *Hang On*, which tips a cap to Rory Gallagher, and the gloriously grim *What Have We Become*, which puts their frontman's honeyed croon front and centre of the proceedings.

FOR FANS OF: QOTSA, Dozer, Truckfighters

EDWIN MCFEE

GRORR
Ddulden's Last Flight
VICISOLUM PRODUCTIONS

French tech metal adventurers plot a musical world tour

Incorporating folk and world music into metal can seem gimmicky when not done with full appreciation of the source material. Credit, then, to French collective Grorr, whose third album navigates a planet's worth of traditional instruments and obscure sounds. The throat singing that summons multi-instrumentalist Sylvain Kansara's literal bells and whistles approach on *Sirens Call* really does transport you to fantastical lands. Vocalist Franck Michel's deep gothic croon and *Blackened Rain*'s fusion of syncopated djent riffing with Eastern string motifs and assorted wind instruments further sets them apart from the tech metal pack. It's such a wildly inventive and well-executed approach that the strings and synths of *Newborn Whirlwind* sound pedestrian by comparison.

FOR FANS OF: Tesseract, Devin Townsend, Uneven Structure

ADAM REES

IMMERSE
The Weight That Holds Me Here
DREAMBOUND

Post-hardcore crew experience a few bumps on their ascent

The second full-length from this Bristol-based post-hardcore quartet follows on from popular debut, *Suffer*, which boasted relatable lyrics, persuasive melodies and effective riffs – and they have done well to stick with the formula. *Burn* delivers hooky vocals and memorable fretwork, *23/19* shows their heavier side, and *Withyou* sees them experiment with a more playful song structure. Sadly, *Southbound* ventures into radio-friendly territory that's a touch too predictable for a band who are capable of more. Also, where *Suffer*'s interludes felt interesting and restrained, here *Mon Seul* feels slightly pretentious, and *More* is a bit of a downer. Still, these instrumentals serve their purpose as palate cleansers and the band's staple melee of fury, hookiness and positivity that surface in particularly exhilarating tracks like *Paralyse* and *Here's Hoping* are sharp reminders of the band's potential.

FOR FANS OF: High On Fire, Kylesa, Barishi

MATT MILLS

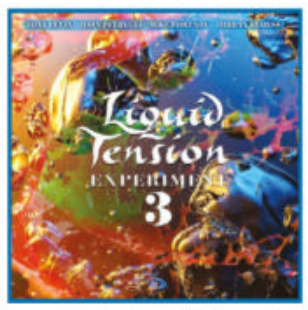
HORNDAL
Lake Drinker
PROSTHETIC

Conceptual stoner thrashers forge a new, hometown tale

Horndal's 2019, debut, *Remains*, was a concept album about a small town – also called Horndal – recounting how its steel mill closing effectively wiped the place off the map. *Lake Drinker* revisits the same theme, claiming that corporations are defiling Horndal's ruins with deforestation and drought. Sadly, although this successor is a hefty slab of stoner thrash, the music isn't quite as engaging as its narrative. This is sludge adherent to the High On Fire school of dirt-under-your-nails relentlessness. The snare grooves are hyper-heavy and the chord-driven riffs are deliciously murky, but its increased length doesn't leave you yearning for more. It's an expansion, sure, but all it's added is more of the same ideas.

FOR FANS OF: High On Fire, Kylesa, Barishi

MATT MILLS



LIQUID TENSION EXPERIMENT
LTE3
INSIDEOUT MUSIC

Prog metal maestros restate the art of self-indulgence

As soon as opening track *Hypersonic* swings into action, you're caught in a virtuoso maelstrom. All the musicians here – guitarist John Petrucci, keyboard player Jordan Rudess, bassist Tony Levin and drummer Mike Portnoy – let rip in an astonishing show of instrumental masturbation. This sets the tone for the supergroup's first album in 22 years. It's exhausting yet uplifting. The four revel in playing off one another. They draw from jazz, classical and metal with a joyous abandon that accentuates this as a labour of love. At times, such as *Beating The Odds*, LTE stray into melodic territory. *Liquid Evolution* takes them into tribal realms while *Chris & Kevin's Amazing Odyssey* is… well, bizarre. They've even done an interpretation of George Gershwin's jazz classic *Rhapsody In Blue*, which works remarkably well. One for those who enjoy unrestrained musical excellence.

FOR FANS OF: Dream Theater, King Crimson, Transatlantic

MALCOLM DOME

Capra: a brief but bludgeoning debut

CAPRA
In Transmission
METAL BLADE

Louisiana metallic punks unleash a fiery opening salvo

CAPRA'S MELD OF chunky metallic riffs and scratchy punk rock energy has been performed by many over the years, but as long as it remains this energetic and rip-roaringly, scabrously satisfying, you can't imagine too many people will get bored of hearing that unholy union any time soon.

This Louisiana quartet are without doubt at their best when vocalist Crow Lotus, who is rather confusingly deep in the mix for the majority of the record, is screaming at full volume to compete with the oak-thick guitars of Tyler Harper. He's the clear and obvious man of the match here with his endless supply of driving and crushing The Bronx-gone-Slayer riffs. Crow's yelp on the magnificent *Paper Tongues* sounds perfect with the Cancer Bats-style grooving punk rock stomp her band smother her with.

Minor quibbles with the vocal presence in the mix aside, one of the major pluses of this record is the production, which manages to balance the warts and all, live bleed feel so essential to keeping punk rock exciting with a much-needed sharpness and clarity in those all-important guitar riffs. *In Transmission* rarely steps away from this blueprint, and it would probably be worth suggesting that Capra at least have that in mind and make a conscious effort to bring the odd new flavour to the table when they come to start work on album number two. But as of right now, and as an opening statement, 11 songs in just over half an hour careers by in their company.

If you are looking for an immediate, instantaneous rush of crushing hardcore adrenaline, then Capra will definitely deliver. If they can build on this then we could have something very special in the making.

FOR FANS OF: Ithaca, Cancer Bats, Portrayal Of Guilt

STEPHEN HILL

Devil Sold His Soul: guess which members got their vaccine jabs?

DEVIL SOLD HIS SOUL

Loss

NUCLEAR BLAST

London's cinematic post-hardcore heroes make a turbulent return

IT'S BEEN A tempestuous ride over the past 17 years for Devil Sold His Soul. Their first two records, EP *Darkness Prevails* and full-length *A Fragile Hope*, saw them picking up a fevered cult following, establishing themselves as a force to be reckoned with before 2010's captivatingly visceral *Blessed And Cursed* elevated their sound and introduced them to a wider audience.

Personal strife, namely the loss of loved ones, and shifts in personnel over the next few years would see the post-hardcore metallers in a continued state of flux, with original member Ed Gibbs departing, returning in 2017 and embarking on co-vocal duties alongside replacement Paul Green. It is, however, this tortured darkness that these Brits have drawn from in order to write the next chapter in their history, nine years after the release of their last full-length, *Empire Of Light*. A honest snapshot of times past, DSHS's fourth album is appropriately titled *Loss*.

Cinematic in its delivery, quasi-orchestral opener *Ardour* unfurls amongst a plethora of ambient swells and rising keys as throat-shredding screams are tempered by soaring cleans and is followed by the beautifully introspective stomp of *Witness Marks*, its melodic soundscapes sitting alongside potent heaviness. Elsewhere, lead single *Beyond Reach*'s uplifting energy and cranium-rattling riffs are ripe for opening up the pits. A frenzied-to-the-point-of-exhausted maelstrom this ain't, but softer moments during the album's second half are offset by some satisfyingly enraged moments, *The Narcissist*'s ear-piercing cries of *'You're on your own!'* and *Signal Fire*'s initial aggression turning up the power and darkness of their sound.

Devil Sold His Soul have poured their struggles and sincerity into *Loss*, with each of the 10 songs justifying its place, finding new variations on an established, enjoyable formula.

FOR FANS OF: Norma Jean, Misery Signals, The Arusha Accord

SOPHIE MAUGHAN

LOS DISIDENTES DEL SUCIO MOTEL

Polaris

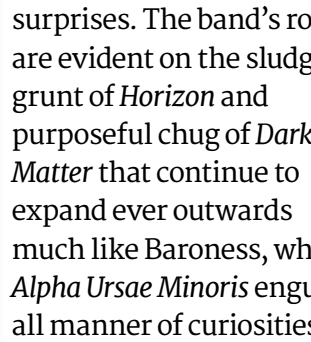
KLONOSPHERE

Gallic rockers rumble in the dirt and aim for the heavens

Having consistently evolved from their stoner rock beginnings, this French quintet's ascent into ever giddier heights may be expected, but it's still full of surprises. The band's roots are evident on the sludgy grunt of *Horizon* and purposeful chug of *Dark Matter* that continue to expand ever outwards much like Baroness, while *Alpha Ursae Minoris* engulfs all manner of curiosities. But while there's plenty of musical endeavour, what's most arresting about *Polaris* is how huge and memorable it is. Nicolas Foucaud's vocals on *The Plague* and *The Key* demand particular attention, while *Earthrise*'s build from sombre opening into shimmering showpiece is a gorgeous highlight.

FOR FANS OF: Thrice, Baroness, Mastodon

ADAM REES



MARE COGNITUM

Solar Paroxysm

I, VOIDHANGER/EXTRACONSCIOUS

Cosmic black metal mission checks in on planet Earth

Since its formation in 2011, Jacob Buczarski's Mare Cognitum project has maxed out on interstellar imagery to illustrate man's insignificance within the universe. Here he brings his craft hurtling back to earth with seismic impact, surveying humanity's folly among the wreckage of a dying world while laying down some of his most exultant lead work since 2014's *Phobos Monolith*. Moments such as the delectable guitar pyros detonating midway through *Luminous Accretion* and the arpeggiated dulcimer-like intro of *Ataraxia Tunnels*, surfacing from a shimmering rocket-booster roast, elevate *Solar Paroxysm* beyond much atmospheric black metal, returning Mare Cognitum to the starry constellations of its birth.

FOR FANS OF: Wolves In The Throne Room, Spectral Lore, The Great Old Ones

SPENCER GRADY

MONO

Beyond The Past

PELAGIC

Japanese post-rockers orchestrate a 20th anniversary celebration

In December 2019, Japan's celebrated post-rockers Mono played London's Barbican Centre with an orchestra to celebrate their 20th anniversary. *Beyond The Past* presents the two-hour performance in its entirety, which focuses predominantly on the latter part of their career, six of the 12 songs coming from their latest album, *Nowhere Now Here*. Luckily, songs like *After You Comes The Flood* and *Sorrow* are some of the most soul-stirring and emotive of the band's career. The highlight, however, is the debut performance of *Exit In Darkness* – a collaborative song between Mono and A.A. Williams that proves the whole is greater than the sum of its delicate and intricate parts.

FOR FANS OF: Godspeed You! Black Emperor, A.A. Williams, Svalbard

REMFRY DEDMAN

WORLD SERVICE

Heavy metal uprisings from around the globe

DEAD EXALTATION

Despondent

SELF-RELEASED

Further proof of India's flourishing underground, this fiery tech-death trio have all the barbaric power of Krisiun and the perverse, proggy instincts of Gorguts and Cynic. For fans of sophisticated savagery.

DOM LAWSON

LOS MALES DEL MUNDO

Descent Towards Death

NORTHERN SILENCE

Aided by robust production, each song on these Argentinians' debut moves between early Katatonia-esque melancholy and stark second-wave malice in effective ways.

DEAN BROWN

STONUS

Séance

ELECTRIC VALLEY

Yeah, a Cypriot band called Stonus with a song called *Evil Woman* sound exactly how you'd imagine. It's fuzzed-up, stoner rock fun time with more than a sniff of Dave Wyndorf in the *'Oh yeah!'*s.

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

MORK
Kathedralen
PECAEVILLE

Nordic black metallers light an overly welcoming fire

Ever since this pure product of the underground signed to Peaceville four years ago, their sole proper member Thomas Eriksen had been trying the find that elusive balance between tradition and accessibility. Mork's fifth full-length picks up things from where Darkthrone left them in the late 90s – still necro but with a newfound, rock'n'roll attitude – and runs with it: rough around the edges with piercing riffing and lyrics in Eriksen's mother tongue to enhance the Nordic sensibilities further. But *Kathedralen* is strangely less confrontational than you'd expect, like a grim yet highly desirable invitation to dance around the fire. Alas, while undeniably catchy, the end result is one of frustratingly unfulfilled promise, hindered by reverential yet unoriginal songwriting.

FOR FANS OF: Darkthrone, Taake, Carpathian Forest

OLIVIER BADIN

NORTHMAÄN
Northmaän
DEVFIRE ENTERTAINMENT

Industrial metal debutant searches for a gloom of his own

The work of one mysterious individual, Northmaän's debut album is an intriguing cocktail of darkness. Drawing on a gothic aesthetic, industrial soundscapes and death metal, it's as bleak and gloomy a record as you're likely to hear this year. As of right now, though, the songs don't quite live up to the idea. Closing track *Tolerate* is a case in point; one sustained main riff and a more downbeat, melodic passage taking turns isn't enough to sustain interest for its six-and-a-half-minute run time. The Fear Factory-meets-Dimmu collision of *Rage Trigger* and the Ministry-gone-post-punk drive of *Dying Star* stand out, and the album does sound fantastic, all pounding drums, thick riffs and haunting vocals. If he can improve his compositional skills a little more, Northmaän could yet be a dark force in the metal scene.

FOR FANS OF: Fear Factory, Rotting Christ, Strapping Young Lad

STEPHEN HILL

OLDE
Pilgrimage
SEEING RED/SLUDGELORD

Ontario's stoner metallers prove overly hard going

Considering their adherence to the pounding rhythms of sludgy stoner/doom, it's probably no surprise that Olde take a little while to get going. But once they hit their groove, the Canadians settle in for the slow burn of fuzz-drenched, downtuned blues riffs, coming off like a portmanteau of Electric Wizard and Orange Goblin tropes. Tar-like sludge provides a near-constant foundation and while satisfyingly oppressive at first – particularly given the band's doom inclinations – the bog becomes increasingly stagnant and ultimately leaves the band relying on breakout solos to do all the heavy lifting and elevate the songwriting. It's telling that guest saxophonist Nick Teehan provides the record with its standout moment, coming in with a howling solo towards the end of *The Dead Hand* that drags things out of the swamp, albeit all too briefly.

FOR FANS OF: High On Fire, Desert Storm, Grave Lines

RICH HOBSON

PERENNIAL ISOLATION
Portraits
NON SERVIAM

Barcelona's atmospheric black metallers embrace the fall

Perennial Isolation is a fitting moniker for these asphyxiating times. The Catalans' fourth album is a tribute to "the border area between autumn and winter". Opener *The Fall Awakening*'s wash of synth explodes into *Autumn Legacy Underlying The Cold's Caress*'s initial breathtakingly fast percussion, before atmospheric riffs cast a veil of icy mist as the musical terrain ever shifts. This continues on *The Breathless Season Bane*, as riffs and percussive rhythms converge and diverge while swept along in the freezing deluge. *Unceasing Sorrows From The Vastness' Scion* slows the pace, allow uplifting leads and reverb-heavy textures to flourish as they course over the skittish drums. *Portraits* aches with sorrow in that beautiful, exhilarating way that atmospheric black metal is capable of, embarking on an accessible and captivating journey – both musically and emotionally.

FOR FANS OF: Falls Of Rauros, Panopticon, Imperium Dekadenz

TOM O'BOYLE

Holding Absence hang louche

HOLDING ABSENCE
The Greatest Mistake Of My Life
SHARPTONE

Welsh metalcore upstarts make a seismic yet sentimental shift

HOLDING ABSENCE HAVE always been outliers in British metalcore. The youngsters may have come up sharing stages with Loathe and Our Hollow, Our Home, but they always owed as much to The Cure as they did to Architects. Their thread of standalone singles juxtaposed shotgun metal snare drums with unabashed emo flair, shimmering via titanic pop choruses, soaring vocals and love-orientated lyricism.

The eponymous debut album saw that formula reach an apotheosis thanks to its mix of hard rock anthems and piano ballads. As a result, *The Greatest Mistake Of My Life* doesn't perform the usual second-album duty of refining a sound; rather, it marks its creators' first crucial transformation. Inspired by 80s indie and shoegaze, this follow-up is a platter of evocative pop that rejects all hallmarks of the scene Holding Absence emerged from. Ashley Green's percussion doesn't have quite the same ear-splitting loudness as before, with the mix giving prominence to Lucas Woodland's ever-engrossing clean singing. This rejigging makes the album feel like a creative unshackling, placing a mightier emphasis on one key fact: Holding Absence are impeccable hit writers.

Curse Me With Your Kiss, *Afterlife*, duet *Die Alone (In Your Lover's Arms)* and especially *Beyond Belief* are all heartfelt, radio-ready invigorators, yet the characterful flourishes of Scott Carey's gleaming guitar tone and Green's high-energy drumming prevent any of them from feeling pandering. Equally beyond cliché is *Mourning Song*. At seven minutes, the closer may upend the instant gratification of much of what came before it, but its ability to encapsulate much of *The Greatest Mistake...*'s tenderness makes it an apt and intellectual finale. It wraps a bizarrely oxymoronic opus, accessible to newcomers but with shifts necessitating patience from pre-existing followers. However, while some may conclude it's a betrayal of roots, it is, in actuality, a signal of great success to come.

FOR FANS OF: Dream State, My Chemical Romance, Thornhill

MATT MILLS

Even in lockdown, Lamb Of God's future is bright

LAMB OF GOD
Live In Richmond, VA
NUCLEAR BLAST

NWOAHM champions relive their livestream

WITH COVID-19 PUTTING a decided pause on any plans to tour and promote their self-titled eighth record, last September Lamb Of God opted to instead dive into the world of livestreams as a way of showing exactly what their new songs could do. Which is to say, the same thing Lamb Of God always do – absolutely pummel the listener with their unrelenting metal brilliance.

Live in Richmond, VA captures the energy of a band thrilled to be back in a room playing together and thriving on creating an almighty racket. Equally, removed from live music for more than 12 months, there is an undeniable thrill to hearing them clattering off each other, the crystal-clear production picking up small ambient sounds that you'd likely not realised you've desperately missed until a misplaced swish of cymbals drives it all home.

That doesn't mean the record doesn't have its setbacks. For one, unable to road-test the material, the songs remain largely unchanged from their studio format; there's no sense of added urgency or dramatic pacing creeping in as the band tweak the formula for the best results. As such, there are times when the release feels overly sterile, an echo chamber of the original album rather than an evolutionary step forward. Conversely, there are times when dynamics originally flattened with studio polish become decidedly more pronounced, lending a fresh vitality to the more established material.

Ultimately, this is a release as much for the band as it is for the fans. While it might not convert the uninitiated to the cause, rollicking renditions of songs like *Memento Mori*, *Contractor* and *Ruin* – as well as new studio outtakes *Ghost Shaped People* and *Hyperthermic/Accelerate* – ably demonstrate why Lamb Of God are still an indomitable force after a quarter-century in the game.

FOR FANS OF: Killswitch Engage, God Forbid, Sylosis

RICH HOBSON

PURGATORY
Lawless To Grave
UNBEATEN

Beatdown merchants welcome you to their realm of suffering

Matching the grim cover art of their second album, Purgatory's self-proclaimed 'Midwest Street Metal' paints a vivid, unflinching portrait of America's dark underbelly in the same vein as *Burn My Eyes* and *Urban Discipline*. Combining the hardest of hardcore with grizzled death metal, *No One Gets Out Alive* and *Can't Stop Our Reign* wield hulking beatdowns and rapid-fire riffs. The incendiary lyrics and gang vocals of *Disease* leave their mark and *Clarity* lets you up for air only in order to throttle you again. Though snippets of 80s Stallone film *Cobra* and Robert Palmer's *You're Gonna Get What's Coming* are arguably the most memorable moments, *Lawless To Grave*'s promise to leave you battered and bruised is fulfilled.

FOR FANS OF: Harm's Way, Despised Icon, Terror

ADAM REES

SANGUISUGABOGG
Tortured Whole
CENTURY MEDIA

Ohio death metallers put the 'rim' into 'grim'

At its gore-obsessed best, death metal offers a lurid, psychedelic odyssey that evokes the thrills of low-budget splatter cinema, dragging you through a miasma of bodily fluids and internal organs, equally gleeful and appalled. Columbus, Ohio's Sanguisugabogg – who have allies in the Troma film organisation – have the shtick down pat, with a concept that involves "a blood-sucking toilet that sucks the blood out of your ass," according to guitarist Cameron Boggs. Throughout *Tortured Whole* (see what they did there?) the band adhere to a mid-paced crawl that could be partly attributed to Boggs' appreciation of Memphis rap institution Three Six Mafia. Gross, disgusting and smarter than you might expect.

FOR FANS OF: Carcass, Aborted, Obituary

JOSEPH STANNARD

SMITH/KOTZEN
Smith/Kotzen
BMG

Maiden man meets Winery Dog and gets the blues

After conquering the literary world with his angling memoir, Adrian Smith is in a buoyant mood. Here, he teams up with Winery Dogs' six-string virtuoso Richie Kotzen, and goes straight for the bluesy, hard rock jugular. The results, it hardly needs saying, are aimed squarely at guitar freaks, but these are deftly crafted songs, with the gruffly soulful Smith and the more bombastic Kotzen taking turns to sing their hearts out. *Taking My Chances* and the fiery *Running* are both riff-driven and catchy as hell, *Scars* is a brooding, downbeat affair that recalls King's X in their 90s pomp and *Solar Fire* struts like prime Rory Gallagher. A couple of corny misfires aside, *Smith/Kotzen* nails the simple stuff, with class.

FOR FANS OF: Iron Maiden, The Winery Dogs, Europe

DOM LAWSON

BRYCE HALL

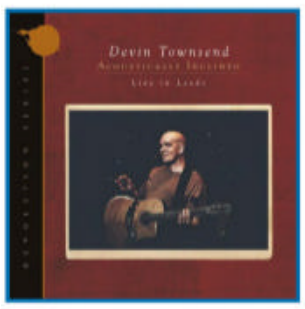
SPELLJAMMER
Abyssal Trip
RIDINGEASY

Sweden's stoner/doom trio take a sojourn amongst the stars

Five years after their debut LP, Stockholm three-piece Spelljammer are audibly in no hurry. Throbbing stretches of elephantine groove steadily unfurl with woofer-blowing, fuzzed-out low-end. Slacker vocals are drenched in cosmic effects as drums plod wildly with warm spontaneity while marshalling everything firmly together. Way before the 70s horror film sample introduces the sprawling, lysergic title track, there are blurry glimpses of Electric Wizard Mk I in their brief sci-fi phase. *Abyssal Trip* is an entertaining return trip to the mountains of stoner space doom – although there are moments of unexpected delicacy, most distinctively on pensive guitar interlude *Peregrine*. No single riff volunteers itself for unforgettable status, but the journey is an enjoyable one.

FOR FANS OF: Electric Wizard, Sleep, Monolord

CHRIS CHANTLER



DEVIN TOWNSEND
Devolution Series #1 - Acoustically Inclined, Live In Leeds
INSIDEOUT MUSIC

Canada's cosmic prog metal guru shows his intimate side

Opening a live record with seven minutes of tuning up and introductions is a ballsy move, but if anyone can have you grinning and hanging off their every word, it's Devin Townsend. The first of a number of limited releases to tide fans over during lockdown, *...Live In Leeds* first surfaced on the *Empath* Ultimate Edition, now freshly repackaged. Essentially a 'one man and his guitar' set-up, the songs are, by and large, delivered in simplistic, warm tones that strip away the bombast you might usually associate with Hevy Devy. At more than an hour in length, it does test the patience, but the little intros and jokes ensure the record feels more 'ha ha' than kumbaya, even if the version of Strapping Young Lad's *Love?* takes things on a Willy Wonka-style *Wondrous Boat Ride* feel.

FOR FANS OF: Ginger Wildheart, Jackdaw4, William Patrick Corgan

RICH HOBSON

WHEEL
Resident Human
ODYSSEY MUSIC NETWORK

Progressive metallers build from a foundation of the familiar

To get the obvious point out of the way, Wheel have a crush on Tool. But even if the Anglo/Finnish four-piece brazenly display their influences it shouldn't distract from what is a solid album of prog metal. *Dissipating* captures the ebb and flow of Tool's song structures while recognising the subtle songcraft of bands like Opeth and Riverside. Its crisp guitars glide over shimmers of cymbal as a tentative bassline establishes the progressive rhythms, and while James Lascelles' lyrical pacing is classic Maynard, he leads the album gracefully. Wheel's consistently perfect layering of complex rhythms with expansive atmospherics and wild outpourings sounds, particularly sharp on the moody title track. If we have to wait another 13 years for a Tool album, Wheel might be the band to plug the gap.

FOR FANS OF: Tool, Riverside, Karnivool

HOLLY WRIGHT

WODE
Burn In Many Mirrors
20 BUCK SPIN

UK black metal brutalists wring might out of melody

It took barely a year for Wode to follow up their eponymous first album with *Servants Of The Countercosmos*, but that small span heralded a key stylistic shift, amplifying the guitar solos to NWOBHM-bothering virtuosity, all while retaining their core, barrelling, black metal pace. Here, that six-string athleticism has been upped once more, this time to a ridiculously thrilling degree. Each song avalanches through countless different riffs, ranging from Watain-slipstream twin leads to stomp-ridden, expansive gothic ascents, all resulting in a cavalcade of stunning yet invigorating sonic maximalism. Bookenders *Lunar Madness* and *Streams Of Rapture* especially are simulatenously savage and fearlessly epic, their technicality sacrificing none of their rawness. With one cloven hoof in the brutishness of 90s UKBM and the other in the twilit melodicism of the Swedish scene, Wode are in tempestuously transcendent form.

FOR FANS OF: Watain, Tribulation, Misþyrming

MATT MILLS

The Lion's Daughter: songs in the key of horrific death

THE LION'S DAUGHTER
Skin Show
SEASON OF MIST

The sludge/synthpop mash-up you never knew you needed

IF YOU'VE EVER wondered what synthpop might sound like were it written by a trio of grim St Louis sludge metallers – and if you haven't, why not? – The Lion's Daughter's fourth album takes a gleeful stab. Their fourth record articulates their bold evolution from a straight up, blackened filth trio on 2012 debut *Shame On Us All* and follow-up *Existence Is Horror*, into 2018's *Future Cult*, as carnal, 80s horror synth screeched along with their bludgeoning grooves.

On *Skin Show*, songwriter and frontman Rick Giordano branches out, retaining the savagery but letting the synth off the leash, exploring a broader and more accessible sonic pallet. Opener *Become The Night* is a carnivalesque introduction to their idiosyncrasy. *Neon Teeth*'s confident stomp and brazen vocals eventually explode into an exhilarating pace, offset by dungeon-bound, mournful keys. *Werewolf Hospital* is as cartoonish in its blistering exuberance as its comic-book name suggests, all zany thrash riffs and divebomb horror synth, as wolves serenade the moon in the distance.

A dreamlike, early-Dimmu atmosphere opens the seductive misanthropy of *Sex Trap*, its brooding verses leading a to surprisingly hooky chorus, but rather than taking the easy way out and repeating the loop, they push the track into a dank basement, ravage it and leave it to bleed out to the tune of catchy 4/4 time synthpop.

Skin Show is an exploration and embracing of the darker aspects of humanity – the monster in the closet rendered in ear-splitting Technicolor by a band bored of what modern metal has to offer. Their experiments don't always work; *Dead In Dreams* and *All Hell Is Mine* slip by without grabbing, but where there's synthesis there's salacious enjoyment. The Lion's Daughter should be celebrated for striving to push boundaries.

FOR FANS OF: Inter Arma, Tombs, Gost

TOM O'BOYLE

Imperial Triumpant's Zachary Ilya Ezrin has a blast unmasked

The Lion's Daughter go hard on the horror

Obsidian Kingdom hit all the right notes

LIVE REVIEWS

SLAY AT HOME FEST

YOUTUBE

Paradise Lost, Imperial Triumphant and Pallbearer forge a dream team-up

WHEN FRANK GODLA, co-creator of metal news/gossip website Metal Injection, presented the first Slay At Home fest in May of 2020, he likely hoped that it wouldn't still be running in February 2021. A selection of personally picked cult favourites and underground attention-grabbers, the event has supported various charities over the months as well as releasing a compilation in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. Available to watch on YouTube after the live event, it's providing a much-needed virtual 'merch table' and platform for a multitude of bands sat twiddling their thumbs and wondering when the hell they're going to be able to tour again. Free to watch, Godla asks for your generous donations this time in support of the Black Art Futures Fund, this year's instalment supported by respected extreme metal label Season Of Mist.

First up, the masked and hooded entities of Belgium's **BRIQUEVILLE** provide a brooding start to proceedings that explodes from a darkness enshrouded stage in a strobe-lit barrage of pulsating sludge riffs and nihilistic screams; a brief introduction to the savagery-punctuated, sonorous ritualism of third album *Quelle*. Barcelona's **OBSIDIAN KINGDOM** make for a smooth transition, their riffs also of the monolithic variety, albeit with less theatricality, as the synth-soaked, progressive-leaning quintet barrel their way through mountainous verses and melodic choruses.

COVID BASTARDS – self-described as "a worldwide collaboration of metal musicians"- cover Amon Amarth stormer *The Pursuit Of Vikings*, and frankly it hurts a little to hear, bringing to mind memories of a field full of sunburnt metalheads rowing an invisible longship in unison. The good times. France's **AKIAVEL** offer melodeath in the Arch Enemy vein, delivering a high-octane practice room performance. Their fast'n'blast verses, melodic choruses and breakdowns are note-perfect, if a little austere.

Next up, **THE LION'S DAUGHTER** perform *Neon Teeth* from new album

Paradise Lost: Nick Holmes reveals his Steele

Skin Show. The niche horror movie posters lining their walls are a solid indicator of where they drew inspiration to combine asphyxiating filth with synth-soaked sleaze, producing a sound more than the sum of its parts. Massachusetts' ferally charismatic sons **HIVESMASHER** have no such artsy aspirations, attacking with an energetic death/grind assault that doesn't take itself seriously. They gleefully deliver curt tracks in rapid succession as vocalist Aaron Heinhold acts up for the camera.

Portuguese black metal quintet **GAEREA**, on the other hand, very much seem to take themselves seriously from beneath their arcane, symbol-adorned hoods. After a prolonged, atmospheric intro they descend into excoriating blasts and glittering guitars, arguably offering nothing new to a scene littered with similarly enigmatic, accessible acolytes. Still, the music scythes with aplomb.

Sonorous, pounding riffs return to the fore with **SOM**, an act made up of former shoegaze heavyweights Constants, Caspian and Junius, as a harmonic profundity offsets the gentle croon of vocalist Will Benoit. There's a Jesu-esque quality to their dreamlike haze, confined within conventional verse-chorus song structures rife with a dark sensuality that Deftones fans will lap up.

There's nothing dreamy or sensual about **HATH'S** exuberant tech-death, having fun with the medium of delivery as members perform from their various socially isolated locations. Vocalist/guitarist Frank Albanese performs his two roles separately – sometimes appearing simultaneously in split screen – on one playing guitar, while in the other nodding along to himself for a laugh, shades on, supping a can before delivering his next throaty howl. Six-man doom crew **HAMFERÐ** hail from the tiny, frozen Faroe Islands, situated halfway between Iceland and Norway. They make for a stoic proposition, as you might expect from a band named after a Faroese term for the death of men at sea. Their performance of *Evst* from their 2013 album of the same name is a solemn procession of sonorous doom metal that makes for the most compelling performance yet, vocalist Jón Aldará growling without remorse in the funereally swaying verses, disarmingly soaring in their shimmering choruses.

Proceedings close with two covers. The first features members of **IMPERIAL TRIUMPHANT**, **KYNG**, **JOB FOR A COWBOY** and **SPIRIT ADRIFT** multi-instrumentalist Nate Garrett joining together from remote locations to cover Deep Purple classic *Into The Fire*, making use of the latter's vocal melodrama in a crunchily fun rendition. The second is spinetingling, featuring the respected Nick Holmes of **PARADISE LOST** on vocals, Nate Garrett again – this time on guitar, **PALLBEARER**'s Joseph D. Rowland on keys/funeral organ, Mike MacIvor of **CANDIRIA** on bass and fest organiser Godla on drums to cover Type O Negative classic *Everyone I Love Is Dead*. It's a loving tribute to a legendary band whose green shadow continues to cast heavy influence.

Slay At Home can't hope to compensate for the loss of live music, but in providing a platform for a diverse array of artists to perform it captures the much-missed essence of festival season. A worthy charitable endeavour and testament to metal's enduring communal spirit.

TOM O'BOYLE

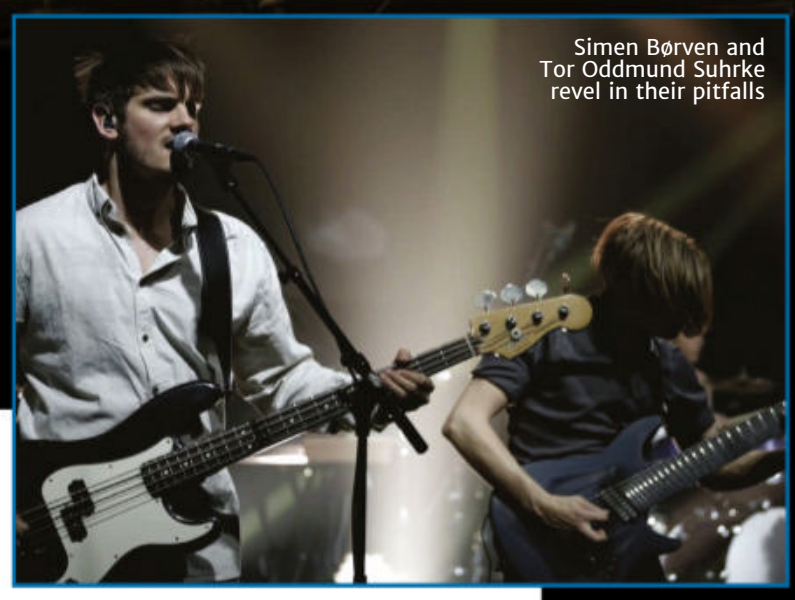
OBSIDIAN KINGDOM: GUILLEM BELTRAN THE REST: PRESS

Leprous unleash a host of Northern delights

LEPROUS

NOTODDEN TEATER, NOTODDEN, NORWAY

Norway's progressive visionaries see double



Simen Børven and Tor Oddmund Suhrke revel in their pitfalls

GIVEN THE EMOTIONAL clout and melancholic fragility of their music, this two-night event from Leprous's home city of Notodden sees the Norwegians in a spirited and, on occasion, downright silly mood. Perhaps it's the ability to play in front of a crowd of 40 that makes it more of a celebratory and jovial occasion, but a video collection of ludicrous funnies from their performances over their 20-year career really is an odd but effective tonic for the shows' haunting involvement.

The band's last two albums are given the front-to-back treatment on consecutive nights, with singer Einar Solberg joking that night one's performance of *Malina* is lopsided with all the hits at the front. But while *Stuck* and *From The Flame* do contain some of Leprous's most potent hooks, it's the epic jam of *Mirage* and the flurry of the album's title track – a longtime casualty of their set for being too difficult to perform – that take gold on the podium. In between shots of Notodden and other arty clips, Raphael Weinroth-Browne's additions on cello are beamed in from Canada, with the video backing Einar on the gorgeous swell of *The Last Milestone* – a fittingly beautiful end to the first half.

Night two sees a lot more movement onstage as the band continuously swap positions to tackle the synth- and keys-heavy *Pitfalls*, with Einar's vocals hitting a fabulous peak during *Alleviate*. Drummer Baard Kolstad's shirt manages to remain on him longer than the previous night, but while he has to replace a broken drumhead damaged during the frantic climax of *Foreigner*, it helps to alleviate the tension once again. An encore of *Golden Prayers* and a cover of Massive Attack's haunting *Angel*, made their own and lavishly enhanced by Raphael's strings, further cement what a gifted and special quintet Leprous are.

ADAM REES

GATECREEPER

CRESCENT BALLROOM, PHOENIX

After bothering both necks and the mainstream of their native US with their latest surprise-released opus, *An Unexpected Reality* (which hit No.1 in Billboard's Top New Artist albums chart), Arizona death metal mob Gatecreeper set their sights on your eyeballs with their debut livestream. Filmed at the Crescent Ballroom in Phoenix, their no-frills, lean and pleasingly mean set showcases a band full of confidence and firing on all cylinders. While it's been over a year since they last graced a stage, you'd never know it as they're as solid as a Sasquatch's sofa. Peppered with some behind-the-scenes footage throughout, the tracks from their current record are the most exhilarating and the likes of *Starved* and *Sick Of Being Sober* are an explosive fusion of *Scum*-era Napalm Death and Entombed's *Left Hand Path*. It's not just the music that entertains during the stream either, as throughout the show there's a hilarious 'Ough Counter', which pops up onscreen every time frontman Chase Mason grunts the word. The groove-laden *Flamethrower* closes the incendiary 40-minute set in style and helps ensure that we won't forget Gatecreeper's first time in a hurry.

EDWIN MCFEE

SPIRIT MOTHER/ MOUNTAIN TAMER

MOJAVE DESERT, CALIFORNIA

Say what you like about this Year Without Shows, but since livestreams became the only way to see new live music the quality of concert video footage has gone through the roof. After the bottom fell out of the live DVD market, we had to make do with random clips from wobbly smartphones. Nowadays we get immersed in cinematic high-def experiences like these, drone cameras soaring above ancient rocks alive with a snazzy lightshow. It's entirely perfect topography for the trippy desert rock of **SPIRIT MOTHER**, essentially a classic stoner-psych-fuzz trio with unorthodox, emotional vocals and more melodic and structural nuances than average. However, their warm jams are spun into orbit by violinist Sarah Jane Long, who elevates even a Quo-simple rock-steady gallop to a new artistic and emotional plane. An independent but integrated force, her extraordinary contribution raises the bar celestially high. **MOUNTAIN TAMER** don't raise the bar, they stagger into it and bring it crashing down to the primeval dust at their feet. Enjoyably basic, rocking stoner sludge doom like mom used to make (if your mom is Liz Buckingham), the LA caveman trio strike a satisfying balance between loose, feelgood grooves and queasy nightmare vibes.

CHRIS CHANTLER

PRESS

CROWBAR

OCD RECORDINGS AND PRODUCTION, NEW ORLEANS

NOLA sludge kings get downtuned in downtown

BEAMED FROM A local recording studio two miles from downtown New Orleans, Crowbar have opted for a low-key performance tonight. But then again, 'the masters of NOLA sludge' don't need to rely on flashy theatrics to prove their cred when they've got one of metal's coolest dudes, Kirk 'Beard Of Doom' Windstein, at the helm. In the intimate surrounding of OCD Recordings And Production, the four-piece begin their third livestream of the pandemic, kicking off with *Self Inflicted* and its Meshuggah-like chugs.

In true Crowbar fashion, everything tonight is drenched in low, heavy riffs and harmonising guitar tones. Kirk and Matt Brunson play with telepathic synchronicity, allowing songs like *Conquering*, *Lasting Dose* and the demonic Sabbathian riffs of *New Dawn* to showcase the best of that deft Crowbar fretwork. It's the first time relative newbie Shane Wesley has played oldie *New Man Born* live, but he pulls it off, looking chilled as he adds the driving bass tones.

Cut with overhead camera shots and the occasional black and white filter, the production of Crowbar's livestream is simple and to the point. Stacks of speakers impose upon the otherwise understated backdrop and the ceiling hangs low, giving the stage a claustrophobic, dive bar vibe. It's NOLA sludge to a tee. Now and then Kirk utters a few words, at one point slinging a "Give me your best Motörhead beat" to drummer Tommy Buckley before *The Cemetery Angels* kicks in. As the latter half of the show throws in some classics, including *Planets Collide*, it's the megalithic *Walk With Knowledge Wisely* that steals this intimate show, grinding and chugging like a mechanical bull. This might have been a gig viewed from living rooms, but the rawness and intimacy of the set makes a streamed Crowbar gig feel like the real deal.

HOLLY WRIGHT

Kirk Windstein charts a lifetime of highs and lows

Matt Brunson tunes in to captain Kirk

PRESS

FIVE MINUTES WITH BENJI WEBBE SKINDRED

The Skindred frontman on Brit-pop, costume changes and, er, Asda

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL • PICTURE: PAUL HARRIES

What's the worst thing about being in a band?
"Dealing with cunts! Cunts who rob your fucking life away from you! I don't get paid to play, I get paid to hang around with those fucking four! It's all tongue-in-cheek, mind! I love those boys, but hanging around with those fuckers for the last 20 years has been quite the landmark! Ha ha ha!"

What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given?
"Don't trust white people! Ha ha ha! No, no, the best is don't expect fuck all, but give it all you've got, and it's true. It was a long time ago… who told me that? The girl from Chumbawamba!"

CLANG!
"I know, well… fuck off! Back in the day we used to play with them: Manic Street Preachers, Sleeper, all that Brit-pop stuff! Then Earache dragged us into metal."

When was the last time you felt like a rock star?
"You know, the word rockstar, I do feel like I try and run away from it a bit, but in private I do embrace it. The last time? Normally it'll be when you go shopping in Asda and someone comes up to you and says, 'Oh Benji from Skindred! Can I have your autograph?!' It's most days in Asda."

What's been your worst experience on drugs?
"Panic attack. One time I had Charlie and I went to A&E thinking I was dying and it turns out it was the first time I'd had a panic attack! I was on my own, I didn't want to tell anyone, that was quite horrific."

When was the last time you cried?
"I just recorded a song, me and the boys in Dub War, and we did it with some of the boys in Snot, and I listened back to it and it touched me quite a bit. We toured with Snot a lot back in the day, and what with Lynn [Strait, late original Snot vocalist] not being here it all came flooding back."

You're busy with Dub War again?
"Yeah, and it's great. I always say it's like having a girlfriend on the side. Skindred is my wife and Dub War is my mistress. The Dub War boys don't care about being cool, so it's just punk rock, we've finished the album and we got Mike Bordin on a song, Jamie [Miller] from Snot on another song, Tanner [Wayne] from In Flames, a guy who used to be in The Damned, we just asked all our favourite drummers to be in on it."

What's the deal with your outlaw country project, Diamond Spider?
"I've always liked movie music, and being a heavy metal and rock guy, you don't get to play with those kinds of musicians all that much. So about six years ago I started this bedroom project to show my love of that. People seem to dig it. It's much more mellow and I'm trying to show that not every song has to be a bouncer."

Have you got the most costume changes in metal?
"I'd like to think so! I'd like to have more but the boys won't let me… that goes back to the first question again. They've given me three costume changes, I suppose that's enough."

Where do you get your threads from?
"I design them all myself. I find people who I think could make them and send them over the designs and get them all custom made. I got them all out the other day, I got about 30 costume changes, still kept them all and can still fit into all of them!"

Do you ever think you'll retire the Newport Helicopter?
"No, I think it's quite exciting. Sometimes I call it the Newport Smellicopter, because when you're playing in a small club and those shirts come off it's a lot of BO. But I do enjoy doing it the most at Download or the big festivals, I never thought people would still be talking about it all these years later, it only happened because we were told not to do the wall of death. I saw someone do it in a hip hop video, so I thought we'd try it, the boys were like, 'What the fuck are you doing?' but it took off."

What made you decide to reissue your second album, *Roots Rock Riot*?
"It's a real milestone in the band's musical journey, and having it re-released on vinyl with all the bonus tracks cements and celebrates its importance to us. *Roots Rock Riot* was our idea of what a Skindred Pirate Radio Show might be like. Chaos!"

THE VINYL REISSUE OF *ROOTS ROCK RIOT* IS OUT NOW VIA HASSLE HINDSIGHT

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